The New Criterion

January 1999

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Notes & Comments: January 1999

Good and bad news at CUNY

At a time when most of the news coming out of academia is depressing or worse, we were heartened to learn that the City University of New York has won a small victory in its efforts to restore standards at its community colleges. At issue is whether the university has the right to withhold diplomas from bilingual students who do not pass an examination demonstrating rudimentary proficiency in writing English. The controversy came to a head in May 1997 when the university denied diplomas to some five-hundred students at five community colleges within the CUNY system because they had failed to pass the examination. One-hundred students at Hostos, a small community college in the South Bronx, sued the university. Judge Kenneth J. Thompson, Jr., of the State Supreme Court upheld their suit, ruling that requiring students to pass the examination shortly before graduation was "arbitrary," "capricious," and "unfair."

Of course, that is exactly the sort of ruling—which appeals to "equality" and "democracy" when the issue is simple competence—that has done so much to destroy the quality of American education. Fortunately, the trustees of CUNY, led by Herman Badillo, vice-chairman of the board, appealed the ruling. On December 8, 1998, a four-judge appellate-divison panel overturned Thompson's ruling and upheld the university's right to withhold diplomas from "bilingual" students who actually turn out to be monolingual (or at least monoliterate) at best. Anne A. Paolucci, chairman of the CUNY trustees, summed it up well when she observed that "the true beneficiaries of the decision are the students of Hostos, who must be assured that the completion of their academic requirements will have credibility in the workplace and at other institutions of higher education." This decision in favor of upholding standards is only a small step, to be sure, but for once it is a step in the right direction.

Nothing is simple in academia these days, however. As *The New York Post* reported, no sooner had the appellate court done the right thing by the students of CUNY than a coalition of "civil liberties" groups went to court to block the university's efforts to raise admissions standards. If you believe that a concern with "civil liberties" has nothing at all to do with seeking to raise admissions standards in an institution supposedly devoted to higher education, you are right. But it has a lot to do with egalitarian ideological warfare. This new suit seeks to invest final authority over CUNY's admissions standards with the state Board of Regents—a panel, in the *Post*'s apt

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characterization, "in total thrall to the same gang of unionists, racialist zealots, ivory-tower academics, and hack Democratic politicians that brought the once-world-class university to its present low state." Whether this preposterous suit will succeed remains to be seen. If it does, the primary writing examinations CUNY requires will be in the department of epitaphs.

Off the record

The manufacture of scandal used to be a tabloid specialty. But many people who pay attention to our paper of record will be surprised to learn that imputing scandal where none exists has also become a common feature of the way that *The New York Times* covers cultural matters. A case in point was "A Fight in the Attic," a story about the Archives of American Art, an important repository of documents about the history of American art that began in the 1950s as a private enterprise but since 1970 has operated as a semi-autonomous branch of the Smithsonian Institution. Written by Judith H. Dobrzynski, the story appeared on the front page of the paper's art section on December 8. The chief point at issue —the *raison d'être* for the piece—was the recent decision to close regional offices of the Archives in Boston and Detroit and to streamline operations at the New York office. The decision was made partly for financial reasons—the Archives simply cannot afford to maintain the offices—partly for reasons of efficiency.

There was nothing complicated, mysterious, or untoward about this decision. It was fully justified by the fiscal realities under which the Archives operates. But Ms. Dobrzynski dressed it up as a shocking melodrama, an "uproar," in which Richard J. Wattenmaker, Director of the Archives since 1990, was cast as a heartless bureaucrat and bungling administrator. "Six employees, including two regional directors, would lose their jobs," Ms. Dobrzynski ominously noted. "The news ricocheted around the American art world, and so did the complaints. But they were not enough to stop Mr. Wattenmaker's plans, which went into effect on Nov. 23."

Ms. Dobrzynski devotes the rest of her piece to painting a picture of the Archives as a floundering institution with Mr. Wattenmaker as its sour, clueless leader who has "lashed back" at critics "in a way rarely heard in the art world or in the Government." One would never know from Ms. Dobrzynski's report that Mr. Wattenmaker is an internationally recognized scholar and curator, former chief curator of the Art Gallery of Ontario, former Director of the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, and the author of a number of important books, including studies of seventeenth-century Dutch art, Puvis de Chavannes, and Maurice Prendergast. One gets no hint from Ms. Dobrzynski's piece that Mr. Wattenmaker has actually greatly expanded the Archives's collecting and publication activities. Ms. Dobrzynski does not mention the many new projects Mr. Wattenmaker has initiated—the recently completed Paris Survey Project, for example, which involved tracking down and cataloguing the many organizations in Paris containing documentary materials about American artists, an innovation that is sure to attract greater attention to American art among European researchers.

Ms. Dobrzynski gravely tells us that Mr. Wattenmaker "acknowledged that only about one-third of the documents" collected by the Archives had been microfilmed. In fact, no "acknowledgment" was necessary. He never intended that the Archives should microfilm its entire collection. The most significant materials are microfilmed, the rest are computer-catalogued, cross-referenced, and available for consulta-

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tion. The thirteen-million items under its care include papers from artists, dealers, art magazines, art schools, craftsmen, and galleries, all of which are available to writers and scholars. This is a fact that gets lost in Ms. Dobrzynski's little drama about the "battle" that she imagines being waged regarding the Archives's mandate. The battle is pure fabrication. But that hardly seems to matter these days for the *Times*, which in its cultural coverage appears less and less a paper of record and more and more a cheerleader for pre-approved figures and causes and—as Ezra Pound said in another context—a stirrer-up of strife for those of which it disapproves.

Strange conjunctions

Connoisseurs of pretentious fatuousness owe a great deal to the literary critic George Steiner. For over thirty years, this self-declared "polymath" has provided them with one of their choicest specimens of pomposity. Rarely has nature united so much preening self-satisfaction with such prodigies of academic double-talk. Mr. Steiner has even gone so far as to bestow titles like *After Babel* on his books—a label so perfectly descriptive of everything George Steiner stands for that many experts prefer it even to *Errata*, the deliciously apt title of his recent autobiography. (Sample passage, about his time as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago: "The compaction, the density of encounter at Chicago was formidable. In my twelve months as an undergraduate. . . ." Only twelve months, George! *Mais oui*!) For those whose hobbies include collecting stories about Mr. Steiner's absurdities, it is a great sorrow that Max Beerbohm cannot make a return visit in order to provide us with a caricature of the master at work.

It seemed like a just compensation, then, when it was announced that Mr. Steiner was the winner of the $100,000 Truman Capote Lifetime Achievement Award. The conjunction of George Steiner and Truman Capote—who in his own way was almost as fey as Mr. Steiner is in *his*—is special. And the fact that the award was established in memory of Newton Arvin—the Smith English professor who fell madly in love with Truman Capote—makes the award as exquisite as sighting a dodo on the manicured lawns of King's College, Cambridge, one of the very many exalted institutions with which Mr. Steiner has been said to be associated.

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The betrayal of liberalism: V

Liberalism and the law

by Hadley Arkes

Before there was a law under the American Constitution, there was an argument about the law. It was an argument, that is, about the ends of the law, and the framework of a lawful government. This was, of course, the argument over the Constitution, and it seems remarkably to have escaped recognition these days that an argument of this kind is itself a dramatic illustration of "natural law." After all, the very appeal to first principles as the ground of a constitution is itself a move into natural law. If a constitution is to make sense, it must presuppose that there are certain principles of lawfulness that existed, as truths commanding our respect, even before a constitution was framed and enacted.

As John Locke pointed out, the legislature would be the source of the "positive law," the law that was enacted or *posited*. But what, he asked, would be the source of the legislature? From what would that spring? The origin was to be found, as Locke said, in understandings that were "antecedent to all positive laws." The ultimate authority to establish a constitution and a legislature depends "wholly on the people." Before there is a legislature or a constitution defining a legislature, there is the right of a people to govern itself by forming a constitution and bringing forth a government restrained by law.

James Wilson made this same point in the first case that elicited a set of opinions from the Supreme Court (*Chisholm* v. *Georgia*, 1793). Wilson took the occasion to point out that the law in America would be planted on an entirely different ground from that of the law in England. The law in England, made familiar by William Blackstone in his *Commentaries*, began with the notion of a sovereign issuing commands. But the law in America, said Wilson, would begin "with another principle, very different in its nature and operations": "Laws derived from the pure source of equality and justice must be founded on the consent of those, whose obedience they require. The sovereign, when traced to his source, must be found in the *man*."

The appeal then had to be to those first principles "antecedent to all positive law," an appeal to "nature"—or, as Aristotle would say, to an understanding of that creature who was by nature suited to political life. The task of "founding" a new constitutional order draws one back to the root, or to the questions that stand at the beginning of the law. But the founders also stood in that rare position rather hard for the rest of us to imagine: their experience encompassed an America, and a world of law, without the Constitution. And it requires but a moment's reading, in any of the legal texts of the founding, to become aware instantly of the vast differences that separate the furnishings of mind of that first generation of jurists from the sensibilities typical of judges in our own day. Two snapshots, drawn from the two periods, tell the story.

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In that first case, *Chisholm* v. *Georgia*, James Wilson and his colleagues understood that this was a moment of teaching, for they were at the beginning of the law under the Constitution with no cases to draw upon as precedents. Before Wilson spoke about the text of the Constitution, he found it necessary to speak about "the principles of general jurisprudence" and to acknowledge the laws of reason and "the philosophy of mind." And so, before Wilson invoked the authority of any case at law or any commentator on matters jural, he invoked the authority of "Dr. [Thomas] Reid, in his excellent inquiry into the human mind, on the principles of *common sense*, speaking of the skeptical and illiberal philosophy, which under bold, but false pretensions to liberality, prevailed in many parts of Europe before he wrote." Wilson began, then, by rejecting skepticism as the fount of all forms of relativism in morality and law.

As a contrast, it would be hard to find anything more redolent of our age than the famous "mystery passage" in *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey* in 1992. It had been anticipated that the Supreme Court might overrule *Roe* v. *Wade*, the decision in 1973 that established a constitutional "right to abortion." But instead, the court offered an opinion that seemed to entrench even further the holding in *Roe* v. *Wade*. In fact, Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Anthony Kennedy, and David Souter wrote a plurality opinion in which they enjoined the country to cease its agitation over this issue. In restating the claim for a right to abortion, the three judges sought to soar to a level poetic, and delivered themselves of this profundity: "at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." The founders began by rejecting skepticism and relativism in philosophy and morality; the modern judges—products of the best law schools in the land—affirm the right of a person to make up his own version of the universe.

The words of the judges were philosophically untethered, but they were not inadvertent. This bantering, this rhetorical play with relativism, had been at work for many years. It ran back to the end of the nineteenth century, when law schools became the vehicles for a new science of law

Holmes was a representative figure, both reflecting and shaping this change in the legal culture with his lectures at Harvard and his writings on the bench. With his characteristic terseness, or his lunge toward aphorism, Holmes marked the new sensibility. He thought it would be a notable gain if "every word of moral significance could be banished from the law altogether, and other words adopted which should convey legal ideas uncolored by anything outside the law."

that would enshrine legal "positivism" as the reigning orthodoxy in the profession. In the classic debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, Lincoln had represented the tradition of natural law, while Douglas expressed the purest form of legal positivism, with all of its shadings of moral relativism. There would be no truths grounded in the nature of human beings, truths that would hold their truth in all places, wherever human nature remained the same. Nor would there be any distinctly human rights that arose from that nature. Rather, the notion of right and wrong would always be "relative" to the setting and to the opinions of right and wrong that were dominant in any place. The measure of morality would be found then in the under-

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standings so dominant politically that they could be posited or enacted into law by the people with the power to rule. By the end of the century, the law schools would teach in the spirit of Douglas's positivism. And by our own day, the lawyers and judges who emerged from those schools would hardly be aware that there had ever been a serious debate on these questions.[1]

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841–1935) had been a representative figure, both reflecting and shaping this change in the legal culture with his lectures at Harvard and his writings on the bench. With his characteristic terseness, or his lunge toward aphorism, Holmes marked the new sensibility. He thought it would be a notable gain if "every word of moral significance could be banished from the law altogether, and other words adopted which should convey legal ideas uncolored by anything outside the law."

This perspective, so startling in its expression, has worked itself into the reflexes of legislators and politicians. For example, the authorities in New York City are pressed to do something about the culture of prostitution, which blights several neighborhoods. But, in a liberal city, they do not wish to say that consenting adults may be condemned in the law for their sexual relations. Instead, the legislators try to discourage brothels by insisting that any establishment calling itself a "massage parlor" must contain a swimming pool or a squash court. And more than that, the squash court must be at least twenty-five feet wide, forty-five feet long, and twenty feet high. As I have put it elsewhere, these are the kinds of rituals of empty exactitude that legislators produce when they cannot name the real object of their concern, or explain why the law is justified in addressing a distinctly "moral" issue.

In this way, the Holmesian perspective turns itself into a routine burlesque in the law. But no sooner has the law offered a parody of itself than we find a jurist who proclaims these doctrines quite earnestly. In our own time, that jurist turns out to be Justice Souter, who wrote his undergraduate thesis at Harvard on Holmes. When Justice Souter turns to the question of prostitution or nude dancing in public, he insists that the law can bear upon such matters only when they produce harmful "secondary effects." The presence of prostitution or tawdry entertainments may become baneful for a community because they draw muggers and pickpockets, and foster a climate of violence. But then again, pickpockets and muggers are drawn by games at Yankee Stadium or by the prospect of crowds gathered at Grand Central Station on Fridays, yet the predictable rise in crime associated with these scenes or entertainments does not supply us with any ground for banning the ball games or the commuting. At a certain point the law makes sense only if it can say (as Justice Antonin Scalia put it) that the legislators meant to ban the public display of genitals not because of any speculation about "secondary effects" and "not because they harm others but because they are considered, in the traditional phrase, 'contra bonos mores,'" i.e., immoral.

Scalia asked just when this Holmesian view of morality and law had ever been incorporated in the Constitution. "Our society," he wrote, had never shared that "'you-may-do-what-you-like-so-long-as-it-does-not-injure-someone-else' beau ideal," and much less had it ever thought that position to be "written into the Constitution." He went on to remark that "[i]n American society, such prohibitions have included, for example, sadomasochism,

1 This sobering point was brought home to me several years ago when Professor Robert George invited me to participate in some seminars he was running for federal judges at Princeton University. The "students" in the seminar were given, among other things, an exchange I had with Robert Bork about the problem of natural rights and positivism. Two of the judges, evidently quite taken with the exchange, were candid enough to remark that this was the first time they had ever encountered the argument for natural rights.

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cockfighting, bestiality, suicide, drug use, prostitution, and sodomy. While there may be great diversity of view on whether various of these prohibitions should exist (though I have found few ready to abandon, in principle, all of them), there is no doubt that, absent specific constitutional protection for the conduct involved, the Constitution does not prohibit them simply because they regulate 'morality.'"

At the turn of the century, Learned Hand (1872–1961) as an undergraduate would absorb the currents at work in the teaching of philosophy at Harvard. From William James, Josiah Royce, and others, he incorporated a kind of genteel skepticism, dressed up with pragmatism. The result was a new kind of affectation among the intellectual classes. The judges marked their sensibility by professing, at every turn, their doubts, their uncertainties, their suspicions about truths, and especially the truths that marked first principles. In the end, they were left with little more than the intuitions that sprung from their own exquisite sensibilities. Learned Hand became the most accomplished of judges, widely respected and rightly admired as a common law jurist. When he concentrated his genius on issues of copyrights and patents, he wrote with a remarkable spareness and with a literary craft. But when this highly tutored man turned to questions of Constitutional law or became more self-consciously philosophic, his writing was marked by a mannered aversion to "absolutes." And that reflex produced in him a shallowness that reflected the public philosophy of his age.

The habit of recoiling from absolutes was picked up by Professor Gerald Gunther, Hand's most recent biographer. As a result, Professor Gunther, who had been a clerk to Learned Hand, began to see the cases, and the world, through the same clichés that acted as a screen to Hand. That screening is illustrated in a telling way in the account of George Sutherland's opinion in *Adkins* v. *Children's Hospital*. In that case, Sutherland, a leader in the cause of votes for women, saw himself as acting on the same principles when he struck down a law mandating minimum wages for women in the District of Columbia. But when Hand (and Professor Gunther) characterized Sutherland's argument, it was through the lens of positivism. Sutherland's complex jural argument is entirely flattened into the conclusion that he was merely being willful, that he disliked the legislation at hand, and that the legislation collided with his predilections. The reasoning offered by Sutherland is never reported or addressed, and along with everything else lost from view in this case are the circumstances of the injured party. Nowhere in Hand's or Professor Gunther's accounts is there any mention of Willie Lyons, forced out of her job at the Congress Hotel as a result of the law on minimum wages for women in the District of Columbia. In other words, the teaching had taken hold. Hand's patterns of obtuseness were now imparted to his admirers in the next generation. In the story of Hand and the judges around him, the villains for Professor Gunther were the judges who

It was understood in the past that when people ventured into public, they had an obligation to restrain themselves out of a respect for the sensibilities of others. Justice Harlan and his colleagues now switched the presumptions and the burdens. People who used uncivil gestures and assaulting words would have a presumptive "right" to speak. The burden would fall now on the victims, or the passersby, to avert their eyes or develop tougher skin.

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were "never tortured by doubt." Hand might differ strongly at times with Holmes, and yet, as Professor Gunther remarked, "they shared a common philosophic outlook," quite representative of the circles from which they had sprung. "Neither," said Professor Gunther, "believed in absolutes or eternal truths."

Learned Hand never made it to the Supreme Court. But he later recommended to President Eisenhower the appointment of his colleague on the Federal Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit (in New York), the redoubtable John Marshall Harlan. Harlan was the grandson of the famous justice of the Supreme Court bearing the same name, the man who had offered the ringing dissent against racial segregation in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* ("the Constitution is color-blind"). The original John Marshall Harlan had come from Kentucky; the grandson came from the schools and the corporate world of the East Coast, and he was as reflective of those circles as Hand. Toward the end of his career, this supposedly conservative judge helped advance the cause of sexual liberation by helping to strike down the laws on contraception. But he astounded observers, in 1971, with an opinion on "political speech" that brought jurisprudence on the First Amendment into a new register. And yet, in that famous case of *Cohen* v. *California*, Harlan had simply advanced the strands of moral skepticism that he had inherited from Hand and Holmes. It is one of the ironies of our time that Harlan could gain a reputation for novelty and inventiveness in the law for "discovering" for the courts the doctrines of logical positivism about thirty years after they had been refuted in departments of philosophy.

Still, those ideas had been much in fashion when Harlan was in school, and he drew upon them with all of the freshness of his own youth. As the key to the case, Harlan offered the cliché that would become, for many judges, their signature tune on matters of the First Amendment: "One man's vulgarity is another's lyric." Speech on matters of moral and political significance was all "subjective" in nature. As logical positivism had instructed Harlan's generation, there were no truths that could anchor our judgments on matters of morality and justice. Statements about the things that were right or wrong, just or unjust, were essentially "emotive" in character. There was nothing "cognitive" about them, no propositions that could be weighed for their truth or falsity. And so restrictions on speech simply reflected the passions and the emotions of the people who made the laws. In *Cohen*, a young man, in the turbulent days of 1968, had walked into a crowded courthouse in Los Angeles, wearing a jacket that bore the inscription "F*** the Draft." The intention was clearly to provoke by using a shocking, vulgar expression, one not yet part of civil discourse. But Harlan, with an affectation of philosophy, professed his want of surety in unlocking the meaning of the words. "How is one to distinguish this [word]," he asked, "from any other offensive word?" He insisted that there was "no readily ascertainable general principle" by which one could draw distinctions. That is to say, there were no principled grounds on which the authorities, or anyone else, could distinguish between speech that was assaulting or innocent, threatening or inoffensive. And, for that sovereign reason, Harlan now declared with his colleagues that the decision as to what language is fit for a public place must be left "largely [in] the hands of each of us."

It was understood in the past that when people ventured into public, they had an obligation to restrain themselves out of a respect for the sensibilities of others. Harlan and his colleagues now switched the presumptions and the burdens. People who used uncivil gestures and assaulting words would have a presumptive "right" to speak. The burden would fall now on the victims, or the passersby, to avert their eyes or develop tougher skin. For years, urbanists had been urging planners to arrange cities in such a way that they would facilitate the

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encountering of strangers: They preferred public transport to the privacy of automobiles; they contrived parks and benches where strangers could meet while at lunch. But Justice Harlan and his colleagues, with this access of novelty, undermined the moral framework for these policies of urbanism. The teaching in *Cohen* made it hazardous for people to venture out, especially at night, into public places. Throughout the country it suddenly became harder for the police to enforce the laws on loitering, to remove the aggressive hawkers and beggars who take over prominent corners in cities. In Washington, restaurants went out of business on Connecticut Avenue near Dupont Circle as their customers finally became reluctant to move through the gauntlet of exotic characters importuning and insulting them as they made their way along the public paths. Indeed, with this small move, Harlan triggered nothing less than a minor revolution in our civic life.

There was the most telling discord between the argument he was forced to make for the subjective nature of offensive or assaulting speech and the argument he had to put in place to establish the claim of this speech to constitutional protection. Harlan assumed that the speech emblazoned on Cohen's jacket had a claim to constitutional protection because it was "political"; it conveyed a sentiment dealing with a matter of public controversy. According to Harlan, what Cohen was doing with his jacket was "asserting [a] position on the inutility or immorality of the draft." There was a point to be made by taking Harlan at his word and asking just which one, exactly, he thought Cohen meant. Was "F*** the Draft" merely a shorthand expression for: the draft is "inutile"? Or that the draft was "immoral"? It is worth pointing out that the message did not mean either. The profanity on the jacket was meant to mock with its grossness; it conspicuously lacked the precision of analytic prose, particularly when applied to matters of public policy.

Nevertheless, Harlan's reading was in one respect correct, but on grounds that contradicted his argument at the root. What we knew of Cohen's message was that it condemned or denounced the draft, and we knew that mainly because he had drawn upon a word that was established in ordinary language as a term of condemnation, derision, insult. We knew it, that is, because the meaning of words was *not* subjective and arbitrary. And in the same way we knew that he was referring to the military "draft." Someone who had taken Harlan's argument literally might have turned around and insisted that all the words were entirely "subjective" and asked how we could know that Cohen was not referring to a "draft" in the sense of wind? How did we know then that Cohen was not enjoining us, perhaps in a spirit of paganism, to "make love to the wind"?

In this way, the Holmesian perspective turns itself into a routine burlesque in the law. But no sooner has the law offered a parody of itself than we find a jurist who proclaims these doctrines quite earnestly. In our own time, that jurist turns out to be Justice Souter.

But we knew that Cohen was making a political speech precisely because the meaning of words is not wholly subjective. And we knew these things for the same reasons that were brought forth, years earlier, to refute logical positivism. The functions of condemning or commending, of deriding or applauding, are moral functions, and they are rooted in our language. The words that carry these functions may change over time, but the functions persist. And if they do, it must be possible for most people to understand at any moment the words that are established in our language as terms of rebuke or of praise. In this exer-

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cise of gauging ordinary usage—of recognizing insults, say, when we hear them—the judgments of truck drivers can be quite as reliable as the reactions of doctors and lawyers. But that moral function will always be contained in our language, because it is part of the constitution of our own natures, as moral beings.

Even people of ordinary wit, then, labor under no philosophical handicap when they undertake to distinguish between words that are meant as praise and words that are meant as attacks. But thanks to Harlan and his colleagues, the law would be founded from that time forward on entirely different premises. The conviction holds, among conservative as well as liberal judges, that it is not legitimate or even possible for authorities to make discriminations based on the content of speech. For example, the Supreme Court struck down any attempt to ban gestures of disrespect for the American flag. As Justice Brennan explained in 1989, the Constitution made it untenable now for anyone in official authority to establish what was and was not permitted when it came to behavior toward the American flag. Some of us thought that the judges could not be fully serious, for what would they do when they encountered the evident misuse of a cross? Mark Russell once told the story of a family of Unitarians who moved into a Southern town, and in the middle of the night a group of bigots burned, on their lawn, a large question mark. Surely one could tell the difference between a burning question mark and a burning cross. The former may be puzzling, but the latter has been invested with a rather definite meaning in our language and experience. And a man of ordinary wit would surely be able to tell the difference between a cross used for devotional purposes in Christian services and a cross used for the sake of terrorizing black people.

Nevertheless, when a case of that kind made its way to the Supreme Court, the judges came together unanimously in striking down the attempt of the law to recognize those differences and forbid those forms of "expression" that constitute assaults. In *R.A.V.* v. *St. Paul* (1992), the city of St. Paul had banned the burning of crosses, along with other forms of gestures and speech molded into assaults on groups defined by race, ethnicity, gender, and religion. It was a telling sign that the main opinion in the case was written by Justice Antonin Scalia, who had become the leading voice of conservative jurisprudence on the Court. Scalia registered an apt concern about speech that would be focused on political adversaries. If there were restrictions on assaulting speech, it was critical that the measures remain "neutral" in regard to their political tendency. There might be laws barring political signs near polling places, but those laws could not be applied only to Republicans rather than Democrats. There could be a ban on "hateful" speech, but those laws could not be used in a manipulative way to ban speech that was critical of gays, and yet not ban the kind of speech that smeared other people as "homophobes." In all of this there was a point, and yet there was also a point gravely missed. There was in fact a species of defamation or assault, quite distinct and knowable, which acquired its viciousness as it diffused its attacks on whole groups defined by race or ethnicity. The notion of group libel was taken quite seriously after the Second World War, as governments in Europe sought to foreclose the campaigns of vilification that had been directed at Jews. In America, a comparable concern for the treatment of blacks, and the fomenting of racial riots, had found expression in the framing of comparable laws.

But Scalia thought that there was a kind of symmetry in attacking, say, Catholics as a group, and the bigots who were "anti-Papist." He thought it revealed, quite sharply, the political tilt hidden in this legislation that "one could hold up a sign saying, for example, that all 'anti-Catholic bigots' are misbegotten; but not that all 'papists' are, for that would insult and provoke violence 'on the basis of religion.'"

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Yet if there was in fact a deep wrong in attacking people on account of their race or religion, then there was no parity here. The person who objected to this kind of speech could not be seen simply as a different species of bigot, attacking another class of people (namely, those "public-spirited" people who burn crosses or attack others on the basis of their race or ethnicity). But in the meantime, Scalia and his colleagues seemed to confirm, ever more deeply, the moral skepticism that was engrafted onto the law by Justice Harlan in the Cohen case. They helped to enforce the notion that people in authority could not be trusted to make judgments about the content of speech, because there was no conviction, in the end, that there were grounds for judging the rightness or wrongness of the political ends that animated that speech.

And so, twenty-five years after *Cohen* v. *California*, we find the melancholy fading of any differences on this matter between conservative and liberal judges. It is no surprise then that conservative jurists, for the most part, are as dubious about natural law, or "moral truths," as the liberal judges, and their allies in the academy, who teach the gospel of "postmodernism" and "multiculturalism." Clarence Thomas stands as a notable exception, as a judge trying at least to recall the origins of the American law in "natural rights." But most of his colleagues in the courts react with a bemused tolerance, or with scornful dismissiveness, if anyone raises the notion of natural rights, or earnestly claims to know of certain anchoring truths that were more than merely conventional. All of that is taken as so much twaddle, or as a reflection of the innocence of an earlier age. Lincoln said that when the founders proclaimed that all men were created equal, they had pronounced "an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times." But that conviction is no longer taken seriously by conservatives or liberals among the judges.

Yet, without the moral premises of the founders, it is not at all clear what can form the ground of jurisprudence in this new age, delivered from those superstitions of the past. Is the substance of justice simply established, as much as practicable, when a proposition is enacted into law? Or are there standards, principles of judgment, that can test the substance of what was done, even if it were done in a formally legal way? In his notable lectures on jurisprudence in 1790, James Wilson made the point that since the American law began with the understanding of natural rights, it began by incorporating a principle of revolution; it began with the recognition that there could be a wrongful law. There could be a measure passed in a legal way, but thoroughly wrongful, or evil, in its substance.

What seems missing from both liberals and conservatives today is any sense that when we speak of natural law or natural rights we are dealing with the problem at the root of our understanding of the law.

For the jurists of our own time, this sentiment seems quite uplifting, laudable, even if they do not quite believe it. Liberal professors of law are especially willing to speak words of this kind as they encourage judges to flex their powers of office, in defending certain "rights" against the opinions of the public, reflected in legislatures. But that flexing of power can be justified only when the judges appeal to a standard of right and wrong apart from the votes of a majority. Liberal jurists and professors have been quite willing for judges to exercise that power when it comes to articulating certain rights to sexual "privacy," such as a right to abortion or a right to homosexual behavior. And yet their ethic of liberation has proclaimed itself by declaring an emancipation from the constraints of moral truths. Professors such as Ronald Dworkin and Laurence Tribe have

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been willing to countenance judges imposing whole new ensembles of law, even when it means overriding moral sentiments held deeply among the public. At the same time, however, they have carefully avoided any claim that they are appealing to moral truths or natural law. Professor Dworkin makes the most sweeping claim for an "empire" of law based on "principle," even though he finds the foundation for his judgment in "a nation's political traditions and culture"—a formula that, in the nineteenth century, would have encompassed slavery in America. As for Professor Tribe, he has been quite emphatic in his judgments, but at the same time he has warned that, "even if we could settle on firm constitutional postulates, we would remain inescapably subjective" in the application of those postulates. In the end, as he says, he falls back simply on convictions "powerfully held." But, of course, if it were a matter simply of opposing the beliefs held firmly by judges against the convictions held tenaciously by the public, it is not clear why the beliefs of judges, merely as beliefs, claim a higher authority.

That, at any rate, was one of the anchoring convictions of Hugo Black, Franklin Roosevelt's first appointee to the Supreme Court. Black, a populist from Alabama, was always distrustful of lawyers spinning out judgments from that magical phrase, "due process of law." In truth, the exercise was implicit in the very logic of law: a "law" passed with all of the formal trappings of legality may nevertheless lack the substance of lawfulness or justice. But when judges sought to appeal to the principles of justice lying beyond the text, Black sniffed out an appeal to natural law, and natural law he regarded as a sham. In the most curious way, Black absorbed the premises of the logical positivists: When judges appealed to principles of right and wrong in order to strike down a law, he suspected that it was merely a pretentious way for judges to say, "I don't like the policy." But in this manner, Black reflected the divided soul of the New Deal: In politics, not a hint of relativism—not the slightest suggestion that the attack on "economic royalists" was anything less than just—but in jurisprudence, relativist. The judges would recede from imposing their judgments, and the legislators would be free to act out their own, emphatic moral judgments, responsible only to the people who elected them. They would be restrained only by the most explicit provisions in the Constitution.

But then suddenly, in the 1960s, liberal jurisprudence began to turn itself completely about, and Black was uniquely placed to mark the change. He stood among the dissenters in the famous Griswold case in 1965, when the Court discovered in the Constitution a right to "privacy" that denied to legislatures the authority to regulate the use or sale of contraceptives. With just a few short steps, the Court made its way from that point to encompass, within the scheme of "privacy," the right of a woman to "terminate" her pregnancy. By that time, Black was gone, but his principal follower on the Court, Byron White, was one of the dissenters in *Roe* v. *Wade*. With that dissent he offered a final reflection of the old liberal jurisprudence: For Justice Black, there could not have been the slightest doubt that legislatures were able to protect children in the womb, as they could protect endangered animals. Nothing in the text of the Constitution barred the people and their representatives from registering that moral judgment.

When Robert Bork appeared for his confirmation hearings in 1987, he was a Republican appointee, reflecting the jurisprudence of the old liberalism. He confronted, in the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, a wall of liberal Democrats who had formed themselves, in effect, into the "party of the courts." Bork looked to be—and no doubt was—the potential fifth vote to overturn *Roe* v. *Wade*. To the liberalism of the New Deal, it would not have mattered. If the right to an abortion were really as important to the American people as the

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Democrats now insisted, then the people could hardly be divested of that right if the subject were returned to the hands of legislators elected by those same people. But clearly, the right to abortion had now become central to the ethic and the jurisprudence of the modern Democratic party. It was part of a larger weave of sexual freedom and an ethic of "autonomy" that was steadily diffusing itself through the decisions of the courts, not only on matters of sexuality, but on cases of euthanasia and a new so-called "right to die." In fact, it soon became clear that the right to abortion was not merely an item in the mix of liberal concerns; it was the central peg on which liberal jurisprudence would arrange itself.

Liberalism had converted itself from a doctrine proclaimed and defended in public into a covert doctrine, whose ends were articulated and imposed only through the courts. At the polls, the right to abortion had lost persistently, in most places, before *Roe* v. *Wade*. Bill Clinton did not campaign openly with a program of gay rights, and when he made that program the first initiative of his new administration, he sank deeply in the polls. His retreat confirmed the new posture of liberalism: the liberal party would simply depend on the courts to impose the more "advanced" parts of its agenda. The party defended the insulation of the courts, and the judges in turn enacted those parts of the liberal agenda that the party would never acknowledge or defend in the course of a public campaign. For liberal jurisprudence, the right to abortion and sexual freedom had become, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, "the one thing needful," and political liberalism had now been reduced, in effect, to its jurisprudence.

What seems missing from both liberals and conservatives today is any sense that when we speak of natural law or natural rights we are dealing with the problem at the root of our understanding of the law. Alexander Hamilton conveyed the sense of these things in the most elementary and compelling way in *The Federalist Papers*. For example, in *Federalist* 78, Hamilton noted the rule that guided the courts in dealing with statutes in conflict: that the statute passed later is presumed to have superseded the law enacted earlier. The same rule does not come into play, of course, with the Constitution, for a Constitution framed earlier would have to be given a logical precedence over the statute that came later. Were that not the case, the Constitution would lose its function, or its logic, as a restraint on the legislative power. But these rules for the interpretation of statutes are nowhere mentioned in the Constitution. As Hamilton remarked, they were "not derived from any positive law, but from the nature and reason of the thing."

The founders began by rejecting skepticism and relativism in philosophy and morality; the modern judges—products of the best law schools in the land—affirm the right of a person to make up his own version of the universe.

For the leading members of that founding generation, there was not the least strain in moving to those understandings that stood "antecedent to all positive laws." In a comment made in passing in one of his opinions, Chief Justice Marshall apologized to his readers for spending so much time explaining something that should stand, after all, in the class of an "axiom." Marshall apparently took it for granted that every literate reader knew that axioms cannot be demonstrated: they had to be grasped, as Aquinas said, *per se nota*, as things known in themselves. That the founders understood the matter precisely in this way was nowhere expressed with more elegance and clarity than by Hamilton in the opening paragraph of his essay in *Federalist* 31. The paper was about taxation, and in the course

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of the essay he did not reach any conclusion that has not been reached in our own day, say, by Bob Dole. But any disinterested reader will notice at once some striking difference in the furnishings of mind. Hamilton put it in this way:

> In disquisitions of every kind there are certain primary truths, or first principles, upon which all subsequent reasonings must depend. These contain an internal evidence which, antecedent to all reflection or combination, command the assent of the mind. . . . Of this nature are the maxims in geometry that the whole is greater than its parts; that things equal to the same are equal to one another; that two straight lines cannot enclose a space; and that all right angles are equal to each other. Of the same nature are these other maxims in ethics and politics, that there cannot be an effect without a cause; that the means ought to be proportioned to the end; that every power ought to be commensurate with its object; that there ought to be no limitation of a power destined to effect a purpose which is itself incapable of limitation.

Just as Bob Dole might have put it. The contrast may become even deeper—and even more telling—when we realize that this was the kind of prose that Hamilton struck off at a moment's notice, writing for a deadline as a political essayist. That generation of American jurists contained minds of the first order, and one benign, lasting effect was that even rather pedestrian lawyers in the middle of the nineteenth century took as their standard Marshall and his best colleagues. And so even ordinary judges came closer in their craft to Marshall than to the Blackmuns and Souters of our own age. The main difference in our day is that jurists have fallen out of practice. They may be quite as bright, but they have been gradually tutored out of the conviction that there are principles to be known, or laws of reason that can provide anchors for judgment. They have even been schooled out of the elementary sense of that being who forms the ground and the object of jurisprudence. James Wilson insisted that the law in America would trace back simply to the understanding of "man," weighing his consent. And by "man," the founders understood, with Aristotle, that primate who was distinctly suited to the polis, and the world of law, because he could do more than emit sounds to indicate pleasure and pain: he could "declare what is just and what is unjust."

Even that elementary sense of things, and the implications tucked away in it, may be quite removed from the understandings held by our recent judges. The late Thurgood Marshall offers a preeminent example. In the case of *Rhode Island* v. *Innis* (1980), a man was arrested for committing armed robbery with a sawed-off shotgun. On the way to the police station, the officers in the car fell into a conversation about the missing shotgun. One officer remarked that there was a school for handicapped children in the area and "God forbid one of them might find a weapon with shells and they might hurt themselves." After several more minutes of this conversation, staged for the benefit of the man in custody, the suspect finally responded to the veiled appeal. He told the police he would lead them to the weapon. The police issued his "Miranda warning"; he understood that he had a right to remain silent—and still he led the police to the gun. With the gun as evidence, the man was eventually convicted for kidnaping, robbery, and murder. But then, his lawyers appealed the conviction on the ground that he had been coerced or manipulated, even though he had never been beaten or intimidated into confessing. The Supreme Court upheld his conviction, but Justice Thurgood Marshall protested:

> One can scarcely imagine a stronger appeal to the conscience of a suspect—any suspect—than the assertion that if the weapon is not found an innocent person will be hurt or killed. And not just any innocent person, but an innocent child—a little girl—a helpless, handicapped little girl on her way to school.

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In the world of law as it was envisaged by Thurgood Marshall, the human being who formed the object of jurisprudence was apparently not a being constituted in any significant way by a "moral" sense. He was not the kind of being who might feel guilt or a need for confession or repentance. Nor could he have any plausible interest in avoiding harm to the innocent as a means of avoiding a deepening of his crime. The object of law or jurisprudence for Marshall was evidently Hobbesian man, whose overriding interest and chief animating motive was self-preservation and the avoidance of pain. For a being constituted in that way it could never be "rational" to confess to wrongdoing and open himself to punishment. And so any appeal to his so-called conscience was an appeal for him to collaborate in his own punishment. Therefore it could be seen only as a form of manipulation; manipulation was a form of extracting evidence unfairly; and so the eliciting of evidence in this way had to be "unconstitutional."

In this manner, with the most unremarkable chain of steps, a generation of liberal jurists managed to incorporate premises that are at war with the moral grounds of anything that could call itself jurisprudence. And in a strange confirmation of modernity, even conservative jurists, moving along a slightly different path, have absorbed the same premises.

But while conservative judges manage to conceal from themselves the deep logic of natural right, they conceal also this critical premise they have come to share with their liberal counterparts: If there is never a consensus on matters of morality, then we must be driven back to the interests or the passions that we can count on all men possessing, quite detached from any moral sense. And that interest will be, of course, the interest in self-preservation and the avoidance of pain. When the conservative jurists reject, out of hand, the prospect of knowing any first principles of a moral character, they too back into the notion of Hobbesian man. That calculating animal, detached from moral reflexes of any kind, becomes for the conservatives, no less than for the liberals, the ground and the measure of our jurisprudence.

If more evidence is wanted, the measure of the recent jural mind can be found most tellingly in decisions handed down in state and federal courts in the spring and summer of 1998. In seventeen states, judges struck down, or blocked, legislation newly passed to bar "partial-birth abortion." In the reckoning of the judges, nothing less than the Constitution interfered with the authority of the political community to ban this grisly procedure. In striking down these laws, the judges were compelled to say things that judges in America had never before said, at least in public. Richard Bilby, a federal judge in Arizona, acknowledged that the framers of the bill had meant to "erect a firm barrier against infanticide." But now, the judge went on to explain, in language suitably muffled, they could no longer do that: It was no longer permissible to erect a barrier against infanticide if such a barrier worked to inhibit abortions. And in other states, judges dealing with abortions at the point of birth were brought to the same

Without the moral premises of the founders, it is not at all clear what can form the ground of jurisprudence in this new age. Is the substance of justice simply established, as much as practicable, when a proposition is enacted into law? Or are there standards, principles of judgment, that can test the substance of what was done, even if it were done in a formally legal way?

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threshold: They could continue to defend a constitutional right to abortion mainly by arguing that infanticide could no longer be so firmly prohibited.

The judges worked their way to this position only by overthrowing virtually every premise that anchored the understanding of jurists in the founding generation. James Wilson did not think that the purpose of the government was to invent new rights. The purpose, rather, was "to acquire a new security for the possession or the recovery of those rights" we already possessed by nature. Central among those rights was the right not to have one's life taken without justification. He had also thought that the law in America would not begin with the sovereign issuing commands; it would simply trace back to the sense of a "man," a moral agent, weighing the justifications of the law, tendering or withholding his consent. If the judges today tell us that infanticide no longer matters, it can only mean that homicide, too, has ceased to be a central concern of the law. But that can be the case only if there is not the same clarity any longer about the notion of a "man," or a moral agent. Or perhaps it means that we are willing to treat the idea of a man as an open question, as something to be left to the people around us to settle for themselves, on terms that suit their own interests. We leave it, that is, to be settled by those in power, without the need to measure their judgments against any standard apart from power itself. In other words, "man" himself, as the ground and object of our jurisprudence, gradually disappears from view.

When that understanding is traced then to its root, when it is measured against the understanding of the founding generation, our jurisprudence is revealed as diminished, shallow, and even corrupt, recognizing no sense of lawfulness apart from power itself. With everything we have heard in recent years, with colleges appealing to their alumni, or hucksters hawking a college education, there is one appeal that has rarely been heard for the reading of the classics. And that is the case offered, in passing, by Chesterton for the Church. It is the case simply for recovering the understanding of a generation far more tutored, far wiser about the world, than our own: that it "saves a man from the degrading slavery of being a child of his age."

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Jackson Pollock & the New York School

by Hilton Kramer

The American artist with any pretensions to total seriousness suffers still from his dependency upon what the School of Paris, Klee, Kandinsky, and Mondrian accumulated before 1935. . . . All excellence seems to flow still from that vivacious, unbelievable near past which lasted from 1905 until 1930 and which not even the First World War, but only Hitler, could definitely terminate.

—Clement Greenberg, 1947

Every intelligent painter carries the whole culture of modern painting in his head. It is his real subject, of which anything he paints is both a homage and a critique, *and everything he says a gloss.*

—Robert Motherwell, 1951

We Americans have the technique to bring something to performance so well that the subject is left out. There is nothing we throw away so quickly as our données; *for we would make always an independent and evangelical, rather than a contingent, creation. . . . We throw away so much and make so much of the meager remainder. We make a great beauty, which is devastated of everything but form and gait.*

—R. P. Blackmur, 1958

Is it possible that the significance of the New York School has been misconstrued? Is it possible that the much vaunted "triumph" of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s—when, for the first time in our history, an entire "school" of advanced American painting commanded international attention and acclaim—might not, after all, have been the unqualified artistic success it is nowadays taken to be by all the organs of established cultural opinion? That the emergence of the New York School in the decade that followed upon the end of the Second World War brought an immense change in the fortunes of American art is certainly beyond dispute. That this momentous change was closely linked to a decline in the fortunes of modernist art in Europe—the art from which Abstract Expressionism derived its principal impetus and ideas—remains a far more contentious issue. That the implications of that decline did much to determine the scope of what it was possible for the New York School to achieve is a question which few chroniclers of the Abstract Expressionist movement have been willing to confront. From a critical perspective of this persuasion, however, the emergence of the New York School is best understood as at once an epilogue to and a quintissentialization and apotheosis of the great epoch of early twentieth-century modernist painting in Europe.

Such a view is, of course, very much at odds with current critical orthodoxies. On the one hand, there is the citadel of institutional opinion that insists on celebrating the New York School as a grand departure from European tradition, quite as if Abstract Expressionist painting was to be seen as some sort of analogue to Whitman's poetry or

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jazz. On the other hand, there is a counter-orthodoxy prevalent in the academy that holds to a belief that the American avant-garde somehow "stole" its artistic ideas from their legitimate European custodians under the malign auspices of the Cold War. The first attempts to aggrandize the New York School by exaggerating its originality and uniqueness, while the second attempts to demonize it for purely political purposes. (To this demonizing political agenda, moreover, the academic Left has lately added equally irrelevant charges of racism and sexism.) Yet neither of these critical orthodoxies seems true either to our experience of the art itself or to the historical circumstances in which it was created.

What is essential to understand about the historical origins of the New York School is that it emerged from a world in which the political geography of modernist art had suffered a severe contraction. Even before the Second World War brought the public life of art in Europe to a virtual standstill, modernism had been outlawed in two of its vital centers—first in Russia under the Soviet regime of Stalin, and then in Germany under the Nazi regime of Hitler. This malevolent fate had particularly grievous consequences for the votaries of abstraction, which was everywhere seen—by its champions no less than by its enemies—to represent the most extreme manifestation of the modernist spirit in art, and was thus even more vulnerable to hostile opinion than its figurative counterpart.

What is also important to understand about the fate of modernist art in the decade prior to the Second World War is that even in those countries where it was more or less accepted as a legitimate, though still controversial, component of modern cultural life—which was largely the case in France, Britain, and the United States—abstraction continued to meet with fierce institutional resistance. In France, except for Léger and Delaunay, the masters of the School of Paris were hostile to pure abstraction. In the 1930s, moreover, the dominance of Surrealism on the Paris art scene had the effect of marginalizing even abstract artists of the stature of Mondrian and Kandinsky. (That the abstract art of Kandinsky had exerted a crucial influence on Miró, the greatest painter to receive the imprimatur of André Breton, hardly mattered. Kandinsky remained excluded from the Surrealist canon.) In Britain, too, despite a spirited campaign mounted in the critical writings of Herbert Read on behalf of Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, and Naum Gabo, abstraction was generally regarded by both the cognoscenti and the public as something alien and absurd. Even a modernist critic as enlightened as Roger Fry had harbored serious doubts about its aesthetic efficacy.

The situation in America was somewhat different, however. While mainstream critical opinion in the United States was similarly hostile or indifferent to the achievements of abstract art in the 1930s, there was nonetheless some significant institutional support for its European masters. The Museum of Non-Objective Art—later to be better known as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum—was founded in New York in 1937 as a kind of shrine to Kandinsky and his followers. (Jackson Pollock worked there, doing odd jobs, in 1943.) Even earlier, in 1927, A. E. Gallatin had opened his Gallery of Modern Art, a collection that favored abstraction, at New York University, and earlier than that, in 1920, Katherine Dreier had founded the Société Anonyme, which was also sympathetic to abstraction. Most important of all was the founding in 1929 of the Museum of Modern Art, where in 1936 Alfred H. Barr, Jr., organized a major exhibition of "Cubism and Abstract Art," which gave the public of its day its first comprehensive account of the history of abstract art in Europe.

Yet not a single American painting was included in the "Cubism and Abstract Art" exhibition, though Alexander Calder was represented by his mobile sculpture. This implicit downgrading of American abstraction deeply embittered our embattled native

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modernists, who in the 1930s were fighting a lonely struggle for recognition against the popularity of reactionary Regionalist and Social Realist painting. This led to a public protest in 1939 when a group called the American Abstract Artists, which had been organized in 1936 to advance the cause of abstract art in the United States, issued a broadside that asked the question, "How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?" It was signed by fifty-two artists, and caused the museum a good deal of embarrassment. It did not, however, prompt any immediate change in policy.

The reason, though never publicly avowed, was nonetheless clear. American abstract art in the 1930s was not deemed sufficiently powerful or original to merit more vigorous support. As one of the museum's curators, James Thrall Soby, confided on another occasion: "You cannot possibly present twentieth-century American painting as we have presented School of Paris painting. The revolutionary impact is not there." This is a judgment that posterity has somewhat modified—for there was more going on in American art in the 1930s than the museum quite appreciated—but not essentially altered. Even the most advanced American art of the time was still largely tethered to European initiatives.

This was a situation that the eruption of the Second World War radically changed. The fall of Paris to the Nazi army in June 1940 marked the end of an era in European modernism. If the modernist movement in art was to have any immediate future, it would be left to artists in the United States—both native modernists and European émigrés—to create that future. Almost overnight, then, New York became the sole remaining outpost of the modernist movement, and thus the de facto capital of the international avant-garde. This was as much of a shock to the Americans as it was to the Europeans, for modernist art was essentially a European creation and American artists were used to regarding themselves as the underdogs of the movement. That its future might now be in American hands was a daunting prospect for which few American talents had prepared themselves. Yet it was in this atmosphere of shock, dislocation, and worldwide crisis—a crisis in the very civilization that had produced the modernist movement—that the New York School emerged in the early years of the war.

Like so many of the other American painters who constituted that first generation of New York School painters, Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) was abysmally ill-prepared, by training or temperament or intellect, to respond to this daunting challenge. That he succeeded to the extent that he did—which was for a very brief period between 1947 and 1950—was itself a remarkable feat, a triumph of ambition and short-lived inspiration over a severely handicapped and unruly personality. The figure he most resembles in American cultural history isn't Walt Whitman but Hart Crane, whose horrific career traced a similar course of self-destructive combat with extreme circumstance to wrest from the conventions of European modernism an authentic statement of American experience.

In September 1939, when the war in Europe commenced, Pollock was a twenty-seven-year-old painter whose accomplishment was negligible and whose personality was already showing signs of fracture and disarray. For two years he had been under psychiatric treatment for alcoholism, and would remain under treatment—mostly of a Jungian persuasion—for some years to come. As an artist he was still very much under the influence of his teacher and mentor, Thomas Hart Benton, one of the leaders of the Regionalist school. He had also taken a keen interest in the Mexican muralists, especially José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who in the 1930s were very much in vogue in the United States. (They indeed enjoyed more favor at the Museum of Modern Art than most American modernists.) It was from Siqueiros in the 1930s that Pollock acquired an interest in the use of enamel paint and some of the techniques for dripping and

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pouring it, though it would be another decade before he put them to significant use in his own painting. It was not until 1940 that, as his brother Sande wrote at the time, Pollock had "finally dropped the Benton nonsense."

What seems to have changed everything for Pollock was seeing Picasso's *Guernica* at the Valentine Gallery in New York in the spring of 1939, and then, later that year, the mammoth exhibition "Picasso: Forty Years of His Art" at the Museum of Modern Art. It was his intense encounter with Picasso that marked Pollock's entry into the arena of modernist painting, which Benton had famously repudiated—an arena in which Picasso would presently be submerged, in Pollock's case, by the impact of Kandinsky, Miró, Masson, and Matta. It was to a large extent the therapeutic ethos of Jungian psychoanalysis, however—an ethos that conferred immense metaphysical authority on so-called "archetypes," which were believed to lie buried in the recesses of unconscious memory but were waiting to be magically summoned for conscious purpose—that determined the way Pollock performed in that arena.

What ignited this heady amalgam of modernist pictorial aesthetics and Jungian psychology in Pollock's painting was the Surrealist doctrine of automatism, which was itself derived from the Freudian concept of the unconscious. This isn't the place to explore the central role played by psychoanalytic theory and practice in the art and culture of the 1940s in this country. Suffice it to say that it was enormous. It effectively supplanted the role played by Marxist thought in the 1930s, and exerted an even greater influence on the conduct of life. Neither the art of the New York School nor the poetry of the same period—the poetry of the generation of Delmore Schwartz, John Berryman, Randall Jarrell, and Robert Lowell—can be fully understood or seriously assessed in isolation from the culture of psychoanalysis. Nor, for that matter, can any other area of American cultural life in the years between the Second World War in the 1940s and the Vietnam War in the 1960s, a subject that still awaits a social historian to do it justice.

Be all this as it may, it was the doctrine of automatism that emancipated Pollock from the morass of modernist eclecticism and pastiche in which his painting remained mired during the war years when his art was just beginning to attract serious attention. His conversion to automatism also liberated him from the bogus mythification of those tacky Jungian "archetypes" that identify paintings like *The Moon Woman*, *Male and Female*, *Guardians of the Secret*, and *The She-Wolf* (all from 1942–43) as the work of an artist whose raw command of the painterly medium, while still pretty crude, was more impressive than his muddled attempts to deal with symbols ostensibly dredged up from the unconscious—but actually acquired from the intellectual hearsay of the period—as his principal subjects. It wasn't until Pollock got rid of his subjects—or what R. P. Blackmur called "*données*" in the passage I have quoted above—that he was able to achieve an art that, as Blackmur wrote, "is devastated of everything but form and gait." It was his total embrace of automatism in the "drip" paintings of 1947–50 that made the breakthrough possible.

It is one of the many problematic aspects of the retrospective "Jackson Pollock," which Kirk Varnedoe has organized at the Museum of Modern Art this winter,[1] that it treats the artist's oeuvre as if it were a consistently sublime achievement rather than what it is: a highly uneven body of work which, even in its rare moments of original

1 "Jackson Pollock" opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on November 1, 1998, and remains on view until February 2, 1999. The exhibition will reopen at the Tate Gallery, London, on March 11, 1999, and remain on view until June 6. A catalogue of the exhibition, by Kirk Varnedoe, has been published by the Museum of Modern Art and is distributed by Harry N. Abrams (328 pages, $75; $35 paper).

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accomplishment, is scarcely comparable to the greatest painting of the modernist era. This approach to the Pollock problem seems to have been dictated by a mistaken belief that Pollock's life constitutes one of the master myths of twentieth-century American life. This belief is baldly stated in the opening pages of Mr. Varnedoe's essay for the catalogue of the exhibition, an essay whose very title—"Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work"—puts us on notice that we are invited on this occasion not merely to examine an artist's work but to participate in an historical romance. "The span from Elvis Presley's first record in 1954 through Jasper Johns's first show in 1958 formed a key divide in American life," Mr. Varnedoe writes, "and Pollock's car crash (like the actor James Dean's the year before) was one of its benchmarks. In retrospect, that accident says 'end' as surely as Sputnik (launched the next year) says 'beginning.'" And further:

> Pollock now looms as a central hinge between the century's two halves, a key to how we got from one to the other in modern art. As the pivot on which prologue and coda balance, he has become in history, still more than he was in life, a legitimator: validation accrues to the lineage fertile enough to have spawned him, or to followers clever enough to have properly read his message; and competing claims abound. Even more broadly, any theory of cultural modernity has to claim the summit he occupies before it can assert dominion on the territory; and in this way accounts of Pollock also become litmus tests for broader philosophical and political positions about the meanings of his epoch. Trying to write his history inevitably broaches larger queries about our own.

In the presence of such claims to world-historical importance, then, Mr. Varnedoe embraces the notion that "normal critical criteria" are still beside the point in discussing Pollock's art, for how can mere art criticism hope to account for a phenomenon like "a central hinge" of an epoch that goes back a hundred years? Even in the vast literature devoted to Picasso, I cannot recall anything to equal this bizarre exercise in museological hyperbole. It makes even William Rubin's misguided attempt to place the paintings of Frank Stella in the company of Shakespeare and Dante seem almost modest by comparison. In the end it is a testimony not to Pollock's artistic achievement but to something far more mundane—a curator's anxiety that a claim to anything less than the colossal and world-shaking will fail to bring in the crowds needed to justify an exhibition mounted on a blockbuster scale.

Alas, it is in the interest of museum marketing and mythmaking that war has been declared on so-called "normal critical criteria" in the organization of this retrospective and its accompanying catalogue, and not because such criteria are no longer relevant to what the artist accomplished or failed to accomplish in the course of a very troubled life.

What "normal critical criteria" amount to on this occasion turn out, for the most part, to consist of the critical observations made by the late Clement Greenberg in the course of his close involvement with Pollock's painting. While paying a kind of pro forma lip service to Greenberg's accomplishments as a critic, Mr. Varnedoe mounts a major assault on just about every aspect of his critical thought. Not only are we treated to the now familiar reference to Greenberg "as a tyrant of taste in the early 1960s," but to a summary attack on Greenberg's pessimistic views of American society in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and the sense of "alienation" with which he identified both the New York School and the vicissitudes of high cultural aspiration in that period.

Taking what can only be called a *Saturday Evening Post* cover view of this postwar period, Mr. Varnedoe evokes a jolly time "when a world war against totalitarian powers had just been won, when prosperity had returned after the bitter years of the Depression, and when an enormous boom

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in new births apparently signaled a groundswell of confidence and relief." Apparently he is unacquainted with W. H. Auden's *Age of Anxiety* (1947), or the ballet later based on it, or with the pervasive influence in these years of such unjolly writers as Kafka and Kierkegaard and Sartre and Camus and Maritain—but why go on? About the spiritual temper of that postwar period Mr. Varnedoe remains as innocent—or ignorant—as one of those newborn babes he cites as evidence of a "groundswell of confidence." Can he really have no idea of the spiritual disarray and psychological breakdown that the war and the Holocaust and the atomic bomb brought in their wake?

There is certainly plenty to take issue with in Clement Greenberg's criticism, and with Greenberg himself, but on this subject—the moral and cultural temper of the period in which the New York School emerged—his pessimism was both accurate and prophetic. He wrote as follows in 1947:

> The morale of that section of New York's Bohemia which is inhabited by striving young artists has declined in the last twenty years, but the level of its intelligence has risen, and it is still downtown, below 34th Street, that the fate of American art is being decided—by young people, few of them over forty, who live in cold-water flats and exist from hand to mouth. Now they all paint in the abstract vein, show rarely on 57th Street, and have no reputations that extend beyond a small circle of fanatics, art-fixated misfits who are as isolated in the United States as if they were living in Paleolithic Europe.

Although Pollock's principal critical champion, Greenberg didn't write as a cheerleader—and it is for that reason, I suppose, that a curatorial cheerleader like Kirk Varnedoe is concerned to discredit him. While Greenberg did not hesitate to describe Pollock in 1947 as "the most powerful painter in contemporary America and the only one who promises to be a major one," he also said of Pollock's painting that "its paranoia and resentment narrow it; large though it may be in ambition—large enough to contain inconsistencies, ugliness, blind spots, and monotonous passages—it nevertheless lacks breadth." It is for judgments like this that Greenberg has had to be demonized once again on the occasion of this retrospective.

For the entire premise on which this retrospective has been organized is the belief that Pollock ushered in a new golden age in American art—a golden age represented by the likes of Cy Twombly, Jim Dine, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Carl Andre, Frank Stella, Lynda Benglis, Richard Serra, and Brice Marden, among many others. One can only say that golden ages aren't what they used to be. On this matter, too, what Greenberg wrote about the Museum of Modern Art in 1947 remains amazingly relevant, for some things haven't changed in the last fifty years. "Pusillanimity makes the museum follow the lead of the powerful art dealers. . . . But it cannot be blamed too much, since it reflects rather accurately the prevailing taste in American art circles." If there really was "a tyrant of taste in the early 1960s" on the New York art scene, it was Leo Castelli, not Clement Greenberg—but to acknowledge that would capsize the premise on which this Pollock retrospective has been organized.

A more reliable key to our understanding of Pollock's painting is, in any case, to be found in Greenberg's observation that it "lacks breadth." But to reflect on that realm of aesthetic actuality is to remove Jackson Pollock from the romance of history and return our attention to what the artist accomplished and failed to accomplish in the only important pictures he ever created.

[Part II of "Jackson Pollock & the New York School" will be published in February.]

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Josef Pieper: leisure and its discontents

by Roger Kimball

The first principle of all action is leisure. Both are required, but leisure is better than occupation and is its end; and therefore the question must be asked, what ought we to do when at leisure?
—Aristotle, *Politics*

The poore, the foule, the false, love can
Admit, but not the busied man.
—John Donne, "Breake of Day"

Neither plenitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker
Over the strained time-ridden faces
Distracted from distraction by distraction
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
Tumid apathy with no concentration. . . .
—T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

One can learn a lot about a culture from the words and ideas it pushes into early retirement. Our own age is rich in such conceptual emeriti, as anyone who has pondered the recent careers of terms like "manly," "respectable," "virtuous," or "disinterested" (to take just four) knows well. One of the greatest casualties resulting from this policy of premature superannuation concerns the word "leisure," an idea that for the Greeks and for the doctors of the Church was inextricably bound up with the highest aspirations of humanity. For Plato, for Aristotle, for Aquinas, we live most fully when we are most fully at leisure. Leisure —the Greek word is *σχολή*, whence our word "school"—meant the opposite of "downtime." Leisure in this sense is not idleness, but activity undertaken for its own sake: philosophy, aesthetic delectation, and religious worship are models. It is significant that in both Greek and Latin, the words for leisure—*σχολή* and *otium*—are positive while the corresponding terms for "busyness"—*ἀσχολία* and *negotium* (whence our "negotiate")—are privative: *not* at leisure, i.e., busy, occupied, engaged. And for us? Of course, we still have the *word* "leisure." But it lives on in a pale, desiccated form, a shadow of its former self. Think for example of the phrase—and the odious object it names—"leisure suit": it goes quite far in epitomizing the unhappy fate of leisure in our society.

At first blush, it might seem odd that leisure should survive predominantly in such degraded form today. After all, the United States and Western Europe have never been richer or more concerned with "quality of life" issues. By every objective measure, we can certainly *afford* leisure. (The real question is whether we can afford to lose sight of it.) We are daily confronted by an army of experts and a library of self-help books urging us to salvage "quality time" for ourselves, our family, our friends. What time could be of higher quality than leisure, understood as Aristotle understood it? (Cardinal Newman was right when he observed that, about many subjects, "to think correctly is to think like Aristotle.") But all such remedial gestures serve to un-

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derscore the extent to which our society has devoted itself to defeating genuine leisure, replacing it where possible with mere entertainment (what the Greeks called *παιδιά*, "child's play"), and disparaging efforts to preserve oases of leisure as the pernicious indulgence of an outmoded elite.

Probably the most profound meditation on the meaning of leisure is a little book by the German neo-Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper called in English *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*. It consists of two essays, the title piece (in German *Musse und Kult*, "Leisure and Worship") and "The Philosophical Act," both of which Pieper wrote in 1947. The two were published together in English in 1952 in a volume introduced by T. S. Eliot. It has just been reissued in a new translation with an introduction by the English philosopher Roger Scruton.[1] Pieper, who died in November 1997 at the age of ninety-three, is pretty much a forgotten figure today. But in the Fifties and Sixties he commanded wide respect and exerted considerable intellectual influence.

The introduction by Eliot to *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*—the first of many books by Pieper to appear in English—is one sign of the seriousness with which he was regarded. Another sign was the book's reception by reviewers. (The present edition includes excerpts from the original reviews.) The *Times Literary Supplement* devoted a long and admiring piece to the book, as did *The New Statesman*. *The Spectator* was briefer but no less admiring: "These two short essays . . . go a long way towards a lucid explanation of the present crisis in civilization." The book was also widely noticed in this country: reviews from *The Nation*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Commonweal*, and *The San Francisco Chronicle* are included here. The review by Allen Tate in *The New York Times Book Review* probably did as much as Eliot's introduction to stimulate interest in Pieper.

It is doubtful that this new edition will generate anything like that level of response. One reason, of course, is that we are dealing with a new edition of material first published fifty years ago. But a deeper reason is that the loss Pieper describes was fresher in the late Forties and early Fifties than it is now. We are farther than ever from inhabiting a culture that esteems genuine leisure. But that distance acts as an anaesthetic, dulling the sense of loss and, hence, the pulse of interest.

Pieper not only wrote about leisure, he also requires leisure (I do not mean simply "spare time") if his work is to be read properly. Not that he is "difficult" or overly technical. On the contrary, Pieper wrote with a glittering simplicity—for once a genuinely deceptive simplicity—but the tintinnabulation of unleisured life deafens us to such quiet dignity. We must stop to listen if we are to hear these arguments, and stopping and listening are among the most difficult things to accomplish in a world that rejects leisure. Pieper's simplicity is the hard-won simplicity that comes at the end of an intellecutual journey. It is the fruit of confident mastery, like *The Tempest* or Beethoven's Op. 135 quartet. Pieper had no use for jargon or technicalities. His favored form is the long essay made up of short sentences. His books—almost all are fewer than 150 pages—sport many quotations from philosophers—from Aristotle, Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant. And yet they somehow escape seeming academic.

In a curious way, this is at least in part because of the subjects Pieper wrote about. Although he wrote important books about Plato, he was first of all a specialist in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. His *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, for example, is a splendid introduction to the intellectual and social world inhabited by the philosopher. It is true that Aquinas does not always elicit clarity and simplicity from his commen-

1 *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, by Josef Pieper, translated by Gerald Malsbary, with an introduction by Roger Scruton; St. Augustine's Press, 160 pages, $11.95 paper. St. Augustine's Press has also reissued the original translation, by Richard and Clara Winston, of Pieper's *Happiness & Contemplation* with a new introduction by Ralph McInerny; 126 pages, $10.95 paper.

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tators. But Pieper wrote about him not as an academic subject but as someone who had irreplaceable things to say about the moral and intellectual realities of life—our life. He manages to make Aquinas's vocabulary seem the most natural language possible for discussing the subject at hand. (He manages the same trick with Plato and Aristotle.) This is a testimony to Pieper's rhetorical skill, the highest rhetorical achievement being to make itself invisible.

It also says something about the naturalness of the categories that Aquinas (like Aristotle and Plato before him) used to discuss moral questions. Pieper first made his name with a series of essays on the so-called Cardinal Virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. These terms—especially when taken all together—can seem curiously dated to modern ears. Yet in his book *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (1965) Pieper shows with beguiling straightforwardness that, by whatever names we choose to call them, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are indispensable to the common realities of human life.

As is often the case with things that are indispensable, the importance of these principles goes unnoticed until they collapse. Then their centrality snaps into focus. In *No One Could Have Known* (1979), an autobiography that takes Pieper from his birth in a small village outside Münster to 1945 and the end of World War II, he recounts a chilling story from 1942 when he worked as a psychologist in the German army. Hitler's surprise attack on the Soviet Union had put German troops deep into Russia. Pieper encountered a young man of eighteen "who still had the look of a child about him." He wore the uniform of a volunteer "driver auxiliary" and worked for the Nazis behind the front. Pieper asked the boy what he did.

> "Lately we did practically nothing but transport Jews."
>
> I pretended to be puzzled, not to understand. "Were the Jews being evacuated? Or where did you drive them?"
>
> "No, they were driven into the forest. And there they were shot."
>
> "And where did you collect them?"
>
> "The Jews used to wait in the market square. They thought they were being resettled. They had suitcases and parcels with them. But they had to throw them onto a big pile. And straight away the Ukrainian militia went after the things."
>
> "And then you drove them to the forest. But the shooting—you were told about it later; it's only hearsay."
>
> Then the boy got very angry in the face of so much distrust and stupidity. "No! I saw it myself. I saw them being shot!"
>
> "And what did you say about that?"
>
> "Oh well, of course you feel a bit funny at first. . . ."

And then?

And then, presumably, moral anaesthesia takes over and you stop thinking about it. In one sense, Pieper's work aims to provide an antidote to such moral insensibility. Philosophy, of course, is a futile weapon against tyranny. (A point underscored by Stalin when he contemptuously asked how many divisions the Pope commanded.) But philosophy is not at all futile in helping to create a moral climate intolerant of tyranny. (Which helps to explain why it can be said that in end the Pope prevailed over the tyranny of Communism.)

Not that we can necessarily trust everything that goes under the name of philosophy. In his introduction to the original edition of *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, T. S. Eliot remarked on the widespread feeling that philosophy had somehow lost its way—philosophy, he added, in "an older meaning of the word," as a source of "*insight* and *wisdom*." Philosophy in this "ampler sense" had been overtaken by various technical specialities, of which logical positivism was a conspicuous example. (In retrospect, Eliot suggested, logical positivism will appear as "the counterpart of surrealism: for as surrealism seemed to provide a method of producing works of art

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without imagination so logical positivism seems to provide a method of philosophizing without insight and wisdom.") Pieper's chief importance was to provide a compelling counterexample. "In a more general way," Eliot wrote, Pieper's "influence should be in the direction of restoring philosophy to a place of importance for every educated person who thinks, instead of confining it to esoteric activities which can affect the public only indirectly, insidiously, and often in a distorted form."

Well, Pieper did provide the example. But it cannot be said that he provided the influence or restoration Eliot hoped for. With some notable exceptions, philosophy—or the activity that goes under that alias in the university today—is every bit as impoverished and lost in bootless specialization as it was when Eliot wrote forty-five years ago. More so, perhaps, if for no other reason than that there are so many more people calling themselves philosophers today than then. Logical positivism was sterile. But at least it made sense. Examples prove little, of course, since in the realm of human endeavor there is never a drought of absurdity. Yet it tells us *something* about the current state of philosophy that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, two much idolized French philosophers, should have published a book called *What Is Philosophy?* (1991) in which we learn that

> philosophical concepts are fragmentary wholes that are not aligned with one another so that they fit together, because their edges do not match up. They are not pieces of a jigsaw puzzle but rather the outcome of throws of the dice. They resonate nonetheless, and the philosophy that creates them always introduces a powerful Whole that, while remaining open, is not fragmented: an unlimited One-All, an "Omnitudo" that includes all the concepts on one and the same plane.

Which means . . . what? Perhaps, as Messrs. Deleuze and Guattari tell us a bit later on, that "if philosophy is reterritorialized on the concept, it does not find the condition for this in the present form of the democratic State or in a cogito of communication that is even more dubious than that of reflection." Or perhaps it is just ominous-sounding nonsense.

If Pieper is right, the current disarray of philosophy should come as no surprise. For philosophy in that "ampler sense" that Eliot spoke of (and that Aristotle famously observed in the beginning of the *Metaphysics*) depends on leisure. Philosophy in this sense is not primarily a mode of analysis but an attitude of openness: it is "theoretical" in the original sense of *θεωρητικός*: i.e., a contemplative attitude of beholding. It is one of the many ironies of contemporary academic life that what is called "theory" today means more or less the opposite of what the word *θεωρία* meant for the Greeks. For any self-respecting practitioner of the more modish forms of Lit. Crit., "theory" involves the willful imposition of one's ideas upon reality. In its original sense, however, theory betokened a patient receptiveness *to* reality. In this sense, philosophy, the theoretical activity par excellence, not only depends upon leisure but is also the fulfillment or the end of leisure. Consequently, the obliteration of leisure naturally leads to the perversion of philosophy.

It also leads to a perversion of culture, at least in so far as culture is understood not as an anthropological datum but as the repository of humanity's spiritual self-understanding: "the best," in Matthew Arnold's phrase, "that has been thought and said in the world." Leisure guarantees the integrity of high culture, its freedom from the endless round of means and ends that determines everyday life. It was Pieper's great accomplishment to understand the deep connection between leisure and spiritual freedom. "With astonishing brevity," Roger Scruton observes in his introduction, "he extracts from the idea of leisure not only a theory of culture and its significance, not only a natural theology for our disenchanted times, but also a philosophy of philosophy—an account of what philosophy can do

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for us . . . in a world where science and technology have tried to usurp the divine command."

Of course, there are many obstacles. For one thing, as Scruton notes, "leisure has had a bad press. For the puritan it is the source of vice; for the egalitarian a sign of privilege." There is also the related problem of simple pragmatism. If "maximizing profits" is a kind of categorical imperative, how can leisure—genuine leisure, not simply periodic vacations from labor—be justified? What is the use of something that is self-confessedly useless?

Defending leisure is always an audacious undertaking. It was particularly audacious in 1947 when a war-torn Germany was desperately trying to mend its ravaged physical and moral fabric. Especially at such times, leisure is likely to seem a luxury, a dispensable indulgence that distracts from the necessary work at hand. Pieper acknowledges the force of this objection. "We are engaged in the re-building of a house, and our hands are full. Shouldn't all our efforts be directed to nothing other than the completion of that house?" The answer is that the task of building or rebuilding is never merely a problem of engineering. If it were, human life could likewise be reduced to a problem of animal husbandry. Something more is needed: a vision of society, of the vocation of humanity. And the preservation of that vision is intimately bound up with the preservation of leisure. Even at a time of emergency such as faced Europe in the aftermath of World War II—perhaps especially at such times—the task of rebuilding requires a hiatus in which we can confront and reaffirm our humanity. The name of that hiatus is leisure. "To build our house," Pieper writes, "implies not only securing survival, but also putting in order again our entire moral and intellectual heritage. And before any detailed plan along these lines can succeed, our new beginning, our re-foundation, calls out for a defense of leisure."

We are not now in the exigent state of Europe in the late 1940s, but more than ever we live in a world ruled by the demands of productivity, the demands of work. Every human enterprise is increasingly subject to the scrutiny of the balance-sheet. "Rest," vacations, "breaks" are acknowledged necessities, but only as unfortunate requirements for continued productivity. Consequently, "free time," no matter how ample, is not so much a leisured alternative to work as its diastolic continuation. The world is increasingly "rationalized," as the sociologist Max Weber put it, increasingly organized to maximize profits and minimize genuine leisure. Now, even more than when Pieper wrote, we face the prospect of a "leisure-less culture of 'total work,' " a world that excludes the traditional idea of leisure *in principle*. Pieper found the perfect motto for this attitude in a passage quoted by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: "One does not only work in order to live, but one lives for the sake of one's work, and if there is no more work to do one suffers or goes to sleep." It is part of Pieper's task to show us how the attitude implicit in this credo "turns the order of things upside-down."

It is a measure of how far the imperative of "total work" has taken hold that the opposing classical and medieval ideal—that, in Aristotle's phrase, we work in order to be at leisure—seems either unintelligible or even faintly immoral to us. Even purely intellectual activity is rebaptized as "work" in order to rescue it from the opprobrious charge of idleness. The image of "intellectual work" and the "intellectual worker" presents us with a vision of the world whose ideal is busyness. René Descartes promised that by using his scientific method, man could make himself the "master and possessor of nature." Three centuries of scientific and technological progress have done a lot to prove Descartes right. Pieper's question is what happens when that technological model of knowledge is taken to be definitive of human knowing *tout court*. Presented with a rose, we can observe and study it, or

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we can merely look and admire its beauty. For the intellecutual worker, only the former is really legitimate. Wonder is "a waste of time." It produces nothing, nor does it further understanding. In this context, it is worth noting that Descartes hoped to explain extravagant natural phenomena such as meteors and lightning in such a way that "one will no longer have occasion to admire anything about what is seen." Far from being a prelude to insight, wonder for Descartes was an impediment to the technology of knowledge.

Of course, we should not wish to do without the extraordinary benisons of that technology. We live in a world deeply shaped by the Cartesian imperative, and the first response of any sane person must be "Thank God for that." But our first response needn't be our only response. Pieper's point is that the discursive knowledge—knowledge whose end is the analysis, manipulation, and reconstruction of reality—is not the only model of human knowing. The word "discursive," he points out, suggests a busyness, a "running to and fro" (*dis-currere*). Such knowledge—"investigating, articulating, joining, comparing, distinguishing, abstracting, deducing, proving"—gives us power over the world. But it says nothing about our vocation in the world. The *simplex intuitus*, the "simple looking" (*in-tueri*: to look upon) that leisure provides, alerts us not to our power over reality but to our ultimate dependence on initiatives beyond our control. Thus it is that leisure is both an openness to reality and an affirmation of mystery, of "not being able to grasp" that which one beholds. "Human knowing," Pieper writes, "has an element of the non-active, purely receptive seeing, which is not there in virtue of our humanity as such, but in virtue of a transcendence over what is human, but which is really the highest fulfillment of what it is to be human, and is thus 'truly human' after all." Both sides are necessary if we are to affirm our humanity fully. Human knowing is in this sense a "mutual interplay of *ratio* and *intellectus*," of discursive reason and receptive intuition.

It is one of the ironies of what Pieper calls the "world of total work" that although it underwrites our objective control *of* the world it also insinuates a corrosive subjectivism and relativism into our attitude *toward* the world. "The other, hidden, side of the same dictum . . . is the claim *made by* man: if knowing is work, exclusively work, then the one who knows, knows only the fruit of his own, subjective activity, and nothing else. There is nothing in his knowing that is not the fruit of his own efforts; there is nothing 'received' in it." The moral aspect of this refusal is a kind of spiritual imperviousness, "the hard quality of *not-being-able-to-receive*; a stoniness of heart that will not brook any resistance." In the end, it is like Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass*:

> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."
>
> "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

As this story reminds us, imperviousness is no guarantee of invulnerability.

It is worth noting that Pieper's brief on behalf of leisure is not an attack on work as such. "What is normal," he acknowledges,

> is work, and the normal day is a working day. But the question is this: can the world of man be exhausted in being the "working world"? Can a human being be satisfied with being a functionary, a "worker"? Can human existence be fulfilled in being exclusively a work-a-day existence? Or, to put it another way, from the other direction, as it were: Are there such things as liberal arts?

In *The Idea of a University*, Pieper points out, Newman suggestively translates *artes liberales* as "knowledge possessed of a gentleman," that is to say, knowledge born of leisure. A good index of the spiritual plight that Pieper describes is the wide-

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spread collapse of liberal arts in our society. More and more, so-called liberal arts institutions are really vocational schools at best (at worst they are circuses of narcissism); the *σχολή*, the leisure, has effectively been drained out of school as "job training" is taken to be the sole justification for education.

Again, Pieper does not dispute the importance of training. We cannot do without "the useful arts"—medicine, law, economics, biology, physics: all those disciplines that relate to "purposes that exist apart from themselves." The question is only whether they exhaust the meaning of education. Is "education" synonymous with training? Or is there a dimension of learning that is undertaken not to negotiate some advantage in the world but purely for its own sake?

> To translate the question into contemporary language, it would sound something like this: Is there still an area of human action, or human existence as such, that does not have its justification by being part of the machinery of a "five year plan"? Is there or is there not something of that kind?

To answer yes is to affirm the province of leisure. It is to affirm the value of uselessness, the preciousness of a dimension free from the realm of work.

Historically, the origin of this realm is in the world of the religious cultic festival, the "Kult" of Pieper's German title. Leisure in the end is human action on holiday, on holy-day. A temple is a *templum*, a bit of space marked off and exempt from everyday uses: so too with leisure. Just as "there can be no unused space in the total world of work," so there can be no unused time. Leisure snatches a measure of time from the precincts of purpose. What validates that exemption is the openness to reality that leisure presumes. The festival origin of leisure is ultimately a religious origin. In the formula of the Shakespeare scholar C. L. Barber, it traces a movement from "release to clarification" and yields "a heightened awareness of the relation between man and 'nature'—the nature celebrated on holiday." This is what underlies the link between leisure and worship. In this sense, the justification for leisure lies not in the refreshment it offers but in the reality it affirms.

It is only to be expected that a pragmatic age, an age dominated by the imperatives of work, would seek to counterfeit leisure in order to appropriate the appearance of receptivity without actually receiving anything. But the natural human appetite for leisure is not satisfied by simulacra. "A festival," Pieper writes,

> that does not get its life from worship, even though the connection in human consciousness be ever so small, is not to be found. To be sure, since the French Revolution, people have tried over and over to create artificial festivals without any connection with religious worship, or even against such worship, such as the "Brutus Festival" or "Labor Day," but they all demonstrate, through the forced and narrow character of their festivity, what religious worship provides to a festival.

We may indeed be at the "dawn of an age of artificial festivals." But if so we are at the dawn of an age without leisure.

It is fitting that in this encomium to leisure, Pieper does not seek "to give advice or provide guidelines for action but only to encourage reflection." To the question "What is to be done?" the first answer must be: nothing. "There are certain things which one cannot do 'in order to . . .' do something else. One either does not do them at all or one does them because they are meaningful in themselves." In *Ash Wednesday*, Eliot asked, "Teach us to sit still." It is a difficult lesson. At the beginning of his introduction to *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, Roger Scruton cites "an American president" (I wish I knew which one) who answered a fussy official with the command "Don't just do something: stand there!" It is a bit of advice all of us—even the presidents among us—should learn to take seriously.

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Edward Said's "Orientalism" revisited

by Keith Windschuttle

Early in 1998, the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney staged an exhibition entitled "Orientalism: From Delacroix to Klee." It contained 124 paintings and 50 photographs, most of which were produced by European artists in the nineteenth century on subjects in North Africa and the Levant. In the notes published in the exhibition catalogue, the aesthetic authority whose name is mentioned most frequently is not, as one might expect, an art critic, but the literary critic Edward Said. What the paintings confirmed, patrons were told, was Said's thesis about the "subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture" and "the aggressiveness necessitated by the colonial expansion of the European powers." This endorsement was strong enough to create a queue of buyers at the gallery bookshop, all eager to procure the prominently displayed, recently revised Penguin edition of Said's celebrated work, *Orientalism*.[1]

Some of these purchasers may well have been puzzled by the cover of Said's book, which features a reproduction of a painting by one of the artists prominently featured in the exhibition, the Viennese-born, Paris-based Ludwig Deutsch, who did most of his work between 1885 and 1905. Titled *A Guard with a Zither Player in an Interior*, the cover picture is one of a series by Deutsch of scenes inside North African palaces and harems. To the untutored eye, these paintings seem fabulous. The architecture is sumptuous, the clothing and ornaments are rich and lavish. The whole effect appears to be a highly romanticized celebration of Islamic culture. Moreover, the Nubians standing guard at Deutsch's dwellings, like the black servant attending Delacroix's *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, seem to be making a political point, suggesting that it is their Arab masters who are the imperialists in Africa. And yet the exhibition catalogue assures the spectator that this uninformed impression must be naïve, because art critics who follow Said have determined that these paintings are primarily a reflection of European arrogance and Western prejudices: "the idea of Oriental decay, the subjection of women, an unaccountable legal system—pictorial rhetoric that served a subtle imperialist agenda."

Edward Said looms large over the current cultural landscape. The influence of this American-Palestinian professor of literature is so great that a remarkable number of commentaries about European art, literature, cinema, music, and history now ritually genuflect to his ideas and to the wider "postcolonial" critique they helped engender. Newspaper reviews of performances of Verdi's *Aida* now frequently feel bound to cite Said's opinion that the opera is "an imperial notion of the non-European

1 *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, by Edward Said; Pantheon, 1978; revised edition Penguin, 1995.

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world." Surveys of the American cinema now identify an Orientalist genre that extends from *The Sheik* through *Casablanca* to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. In the prodigious new reference work *Companion to Historiography*, edited by Michael Bentley, an entire chapter is devoted to Said, giving him as much space as the whole corpus of ancient Greek historians. Above all, he holds sway over the literary criticism of the nineteenth-century novel. His most recent magnum opus, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), is a critique not only of those authors like Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad who wrote about Europe's colonies and dependencies, but also of such quintessentially domestic writers as Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. In the new Penguin Classics edition of Austen's *Mansfield Park*, the editor's introduction approvingly quotes Said's explanation of the Bertram estate "as part of the structure of an expanding imperialist venture," and even the cover blurb feels obliged to call attention to the introduction where "the family's investment in slavery and sugar is considered in a new post-colonial light." For analyses of this kind, *The New York Times* in September 1998 declared him "one of the most important literary critics alive."

The book that made Said famous was *Orientalism*, published in 1978. This is a critique of the academic field of Oriental Studies, which has been a scholarly pursuit at most of the prestigious European universities for several centuries. Oriental Studies is a composite area of scholarship comprising philology, linguistics, ethnography, and the interpretation of culture through the discovery, recovery, compilation, and translation of Oriental texts. Said makes it clear that he is not attempting to cover the whole area. His focus is on how English, French, and American scholars have approached the Arab societies of North Africa and the Middle East. He has nothing on the other areas that traditionally comprised the field such as Hebrew, Persian, Turkish, Indian, and Far Eastern cultures, nor does he discuss the attitudes of German, Russian, Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese Orientalists. The period he covers is more restricted than the scholarly field, too, extending only from the late eighteenth century to the present, whereas European scholarship on the Orient dates back to the High Middle Ages. Within his time frame, however, Said extends his examination beyond the works of recognized Orientalist academics to take in literature, journalism, travel books, and religious and philosophical studies to produce a broadly historical and anthropological perspective.

His book makes three major claims. The first is that Orientalism, although purporting to be an objective, disinterested, and rather esoteric field, in fact functioned to serve political ends. Orientalist scholarship provided the means through which Europeans could take over Oriental lands. Said is quite clear about the causal sequence: "Colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact." Imperial administrators like Lord Curzon, a Viceroy of India, agreed that the products of this scholarship—"our familiarity, not merely with the languages of the people of the East but with their customs, their feelings, their traditions, their history, and religion"—had provided "the sole basis upon which we are likely to be able to maintain in the future the position we have won." In the late twentieth century, the field helps preserve American power in the Middle East and defends what Said calls "the Zionist invasion and colonization of Palestine." Today, however, there is much less interest in the traditional fields of philology and literature. American academic centers for Middle Eastern studies are more concerned with providing direct advice to the government on public policy. Overall, Said submits, his work demonstrates "the metamorphosis of a relatively innocuous philological subspecialty into a capacity for managing political movements, administering colonies, making nearly apocalyptic statements representing the White Man's difficult civilizing mission."

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His second claim is that Orientalism helped define Europe's self-image. "It has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world." The construction of identity in every age and every society, Said maintains, involves establishing opposites and "Others." This happens because "the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another different and competing *alter ego*." Orientalism led the West to see Islamic culture as static in both time and place, as "eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself." This gave Europe a sense of its own cultural and intellectual superiority. The West consequently saw itself as a dynamic, innovative, expanding culture, as well as "the spectator, the judge and jury of every facet of Oriental behavior." This became part of its imperial conceit. In 1810, the French author Chateaubriand called upon Europe to teach the Orient the meaning of liberty which he, and everyone after him, believed the Orientals knew nothing about. Said says he thereby provided the rationale for Western imperialism, which could be described by its perpetrators not as a form of conquest, but as the redemption of a degenerate world.

Thirdly, Said argues that Orientalism has produced a false description of Arabs and Islamic culture. This happened primarily because of the essentialist nature of the enterprise—that is, the belief that it was possible to define the essential qualities of Arab peoples and Islamic culture. These qualities were seen in uniformly negative terms, he says. The Orient was defined as a place isolated from the mainstream of human progress in the sciences, arts, and commerce. Hence: "its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habit of inaccuracy, its backwardness." Where this approach first goes wrong, Said says, is in its belief that there could be such a thing as *an* Islamic society, *an* Arab mind, *an* Oriental psyche. No one today, he points out, would dare talk about blacks or Jews using such essentialist clichés. Where Orientalism goes even further astray, he claims, is its anachronistic assumption that Islam has possessed a unity since the seventh century, which can be read, via the Koran, into every facet of, say, modern Egyptian or Algerian society. The notion that Muslims suffer such a form of arrested development not only is false, he maintains, but also ignores more recent and important influences such as the experience of colonialism, imperialism, and, even, ordinary politics.

The faults of Orientalism, moreover, have not been confined to analyses of the Orient. Said claims there have been counterparts in "similar knowledges" constructed about Native Americans and Africans where there is a chronic tendency to deny, suppress, or distort their systems of thought in order to maintain the fiction of scholarly disinterest. In other words, Said presents his work not only as an examination of European attitudes to Islam and the Arabs but also as a model for analysis of all Western "discourses on the Other."

This strategy has worked remarkably well. Today, twenty years after his work was first published, Said is widely regarded by students of literature and cultural studies as not only one of the founders of the postcolonial movement in criticism and of multiculturalism in politics, but still one of their chief gurus. This is despite the fact that his work was not original, as Said himself acknowledges. It is a synthesis and elaboration of two separate theses. One was an analysis that emerged among a number of Muslim academics working in Europe in the 1960s. Said cites the Coptic socialist author Anwar Abdel Malek, who wrote in France using the then latest Parisian versions of Freudian and Marxist theory. He accused the Orientalists of being "Europocentric," of failing to pay enough attention to Arab scholars like himself, of being obsessed with the past, and of stamping all Orientals with "a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character." This essentialist conception of the peoples of the Orient, Abdel Malek wrote, expresses itself through an "ethnist typology . . . and will soon proceed with it towards racism."

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The other source of Said's inspiration also derived from Paris in the Sixties. This is the writing of Michel Foucault, especially his notion that academic disciplines do not simply produce knowledge but also generate power. Said uses Foucault to argue that Orientalism helped produce European imperialism. "No more glaring parallel exists," Said says, "between power and knowledge in the modern history of philology than in the case of Orientalism." He also borrowed from Foucault the notion of a "discourse," the ideological framework within which scholarship takes place. Within a discourse, all representations are tainted by the language, culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. Hence there can be no "truths," Said argues, only formations or deformations. No scholar or writer can rise above these limitations, and even a towering figure like Louis Massignon, who dominated French Orientalism until the 1960s, was no more than "a kind of system for producing certain kinds of statements, disseminated into the large mass of discursive formations that together make up the archive, or cultural material of his time."

Said quickly assures us that putting it this way does not dehumanize poor Louis. But what it does mean is that "every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric." Note that this is not a contingent matter. Said is not merely talking about what Europeans actually did say, but rather what they possibly could say. In short, the prevailing discourse renders Europeans, of necessity, racists.

Before pointing out some of the problems with these arguments, it should be acknowledged that Said does score a few hits. He shows that there were plenty of nineteenth-century European travel writers and journalists who visited the Orient and quickly developed an ill-informed opinion of the Arabs and their religion. It is a surprise to find the historians Leopold von Ranke and Jacob Burckhardt expressing some agreement with such views. It is not so surprising to find genuine racists of the period—like Joseph Arthur Gobineau, whose *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* later provided the Nazis with a rationale—espousing such views.

Although Said makes excuses for him, one of the worst offenders in this regard was plainly Karl Marx. Said cites the following passage:

> We must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. . . . England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of the Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia.

But none of these examples, nor indeed all of them combined, are sufficient to sustain Said's thesis. It is not difficult to show that each of his three main claims about Orientalism is seriously flawed.

For a start, he should have realized that Abdel Malek's analysis of the essentialist failings of Oriental scholarship and Foucault's thesis that knowledge always generates power are quite incompatible. If, as Malek and Said claim, Orientalism's picture of the Arabs is false, then it is difficult to see how it could have been the source of the knowledge that led to the European imperial domination of the region. According to Said, Orientalist essentialism is not knowledge, but a series of beliefs that are both distorted and out of date. Surely, though, if these beliefs are wrong, they would have contributed to poor judgment, bad estimates, and mistaken policies. Hence the political power of Western imperialism must have been gained despite them, not because of them.

In fact, Said's whole attempt to identify Oriental Studies as a cause of imperialism

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does not deserve to be taken seriously. The only plausible connection he establishes between Oriental scholarship and imperialism is the example of the Comte de Volney, who wrote two travel books on Syria and Egypt in the 1780s suggesting that the decaying rule of the Ottoman Empire in those countries made them ripe for political change. Napoleon used Volney's arguments to justify his brief, ill-fated expedition to Egypt in 1798, though Volney himself was an opponent of French involvement there. But nowhere else does Said provide an analysis of the thoughts and reasons of the imperial decision-makers at the time they actually entered upon Europe's Oriental adventures. At most, Said establishes that Orientalism provided the West with a command of Oriental languages and culture, plus a background mindset that convinced it of its cultural and technological advance over Islam. But these are far from sufficient causes of imperial conquest since they explain neither motives, opportunities, nor objectives.

Said gives the impression of offering more when he cites speeches and essays by Lord Cromer, Arthur Balfour, and Lord Curzon that paid some recognition to the work of Orientalist scholarship in helping to manage the Empire. But all of these quotations come from works written between 1908 and 1912, that is, more than twenty-five years after the peak of Britain's imperial expansion. Rather than expressing the aims and objectives of potential imperial conquests, these speeches are ex post facto justifications, sanctioned by hindsight. In Curzon's case, the speech, from which the extracts above are quoted, was given in the House of Lords in 1909, four years after he returned from India. It was made to support the funding of a new London school of Oriental Studies. He had been recruited to the school's founding committee and, not surprisingly, was painting its prospects in the best light he could.

Apart from Foucault's grandiose hypothesis that knowledge always generates power, Said provides no support at all for his contention that "colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism" because he fails to cite evidence about the actual causal sequence that led to the annexation of any of the territories occupied by England or France in the nineteenth century. Where real historians have attempted this, they have come to quite different conclusions, with trade, investment, and military causes predominating. The decisions of the British to move into North Africa and the Middle East in the 1880s, for instance, were based on rivalry with the French, the need to guarantee the sea routes to India and China, and to protect British financial interests from nationalist challenges after Egypt became bankrupt. Philology did not come into it. Even Lenin has a more convincing explanation of imperialism than Said.

Said's inept handling of historical material is evident throughout the book. He claims that, by the end of the seventeenth century, Britain and France dominated the eastern Mediterranean, whereas in reality the Levant was still controlled for the next hundred years by the Ottomans, and British and French merchants could only land with the permission of the Sultan. Said describes Egypt as a "colony" of Britain, whereas the legal status of British occupation of Egypt was never more than that of a protectorate. This is not merely a semantic difference because a real colony, like Australia or Algeria, was a place where large numbers of Europeans settled, which never happened in Egypt. Even on Islamic history, Said is unreliable. He claims that Muslim armies conquered Turkey before they took over North Africa. The facts are that the Arabs invaded North Africa in the seventh century, but what is now Turkey remained part of the Eastern Roman Empire and was a Christian country until conquered by the Seljuk Turks late in the eleventh century. The fact that these howlers have been preserved in the 1995 edition of the book suggests that Said lacks friends, admirers, or advisers with expertise in history who might have sent him a list of corrections.

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Said justifies his decision to omit German Orientalists from his analysis by claiming that German scholars came to the field later than the British and French, and merely elaborated on the work originally done by their European rivals. This claim has generated considerable scorn among contemporary Oriental scholars. Bernard Lewis argues that "at no time before or after the imperial age did their [British and French] contribution, in range, depth, or standard, match the achievement of the great centers of Oriental studies in Germany and neighboring countries." To omit German scholarship in this way is like trying to do a survey of the discipline of sociology without mentioning Weber, Simmel, or Tönnies. It is quite clear, however, where Said derived the incentive for this strategy. The Germans were prominent Orientalists, yet Germany never went on to become an imperial power in any of the Oriental countries of North Africa or the Middle East. For the Germans, knowledge did not generate power in the way that Foucault's theory said it should. So, rather than admit this or try to explain it away, Said conveniently omits Germany from his survey.

The second part of Said's thesis has just as little to recommend it. The notion that Western culture has needed an "Other" to define its own identity derives from the structuralist version of Freudian theory that became prominent in France in the 1960s. An individual's self-concept, this thesis maintains, emerges only when he recognizes himself as separate from and different from others. Cultures need to go through an analogous process, it is claimed, and so must identify themselves through an alter ego. In other words, the need for an "Other" is built into human nature at both the individual and collective levels. This is a central concept of Said's thesis but, unfortunately, it leads him into a direct contradiction with one of his core methodological dicta: his rejection of essentialism. In the afterword to the 1995 edition of *Orientalism*, he complains that the book has been misread by hostile critics as an essentialist polemic against Western civilization. He says he would condemn any "attempt to force cultures and peoples into separate and distinct breeds or essences. . . . This false position hides historical change." His own approach is "explicitly anti-essentialist." It is difficult, though, to reconcile this assertion with the way he characterizes Western identity. He argues that, from its origins, the West's self-concept was defined by its opposition to Asia.

> Consider first the demarcation between Orient and the West. It already seems bold by the time of the *Iliad*. Two of the most profoundly influential qualities associated with the East appear in Aeschylus's *The Persians*, the earliest Athenian play extant, and in *The Bacchae* of Euripides, the very last one extant. . . . The two aspects of the Orient that set it off from the West in this pair of plays will remain essential motifs of European imaginative geography. A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant.

These same motifs persist in Western culture, he claims, right down to the modern period. This is a tradition that accommodates perspectives as divergent as those of Aeschylus, Dante, Victor Hugo, and Karl Marx. However, in describing "the essential motifs" of the European geographic imagination that have persisted since ancient Greece, he is ascribing to the West a coherent self-identity that has produced a specific set of value judgments—"Europe is powerful and articulate: Asia is defeated and distant"—that have remained constant for the past 2500 years. This is, of course, nothing less than the use of the very notion of "essentialism" that he elsewhere condemns so vigorously. In short, it is his own work that is essentialist and ahistorical. He himself commits the very faults he says are so objectionable in the work of Orientalists.

The proposition that produces this contradiction is the claim that every culture needs to be defined by an Other. This is not

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an historical statement at all, but an epistemological assumption derived from structuralist theory. It is now such a standard refrain within cultural studies that it usually goes unquestioned. There is, however, very little to recommend it. Although they have long distinguished themselves from the barbarians of the world, Europeans do not primarily draw their identity from comparisons with other cultures. Instead, identity comes from their own heritage. Europeans identify themselves as joint heirs of classical Greece and Christianity, each tempered by the fluxes of medieval scholasticism, the Renaissance, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Enlightenment, and modernism. In other words, Western identity is overwhelmingly defined by historical references to its earlier selves, rather than by geographical comparisons with others. To claim otherwise is to deny the central thrust of Western education for the past one thousand years.

The final component of Said's thesis, the allegedly false essentialism of Orientalism, not only contradicts his own methodological assumptions, but is a curious argument in itself. Going back to the origins of a culture to examine its founding principles is hardly something to be condemned. This is especially so in the case of Islam where the founding book, the Koran, is taken much more literally by its adherents than the overt text of the Bible is taken by Christians today. In several countries, the Koran is both a religious and legal text. In others, like Egypt and Algeria, there are political movements prepared to resort to terrorism to have it made the basis of national law and authority. Moreover, one could not understand the most bitter division in the modern Islamic world, that between Shi'ites and Sunnis, without knowing its origins in the conflicts over succession after the death of Muhammed in 632, any more than one could properly understand events in contemporary Northern Ireland without some knowledge of the breach in the Christian world that occurred during the Reformation. One Muslim critic, Sadik Jalal al-'Azm, has argued that the kind of religious essentialism of which Said indicts Orientalism is actually necessary to understand the Muslim mind:

> [I]t is true that in general the unseen is more immediate and real to the common citizens of Cairo and Damascus than it is to the present inhabitants of New York and Paris; it is true that religion "means everything" to the life of the Moroccan peasants in a way that must remain incomprehensible to present day American farmers.

Of course, Said would be right to complain were Western ideas about Islamic peoples confined solely to stereotypes derived from their founding texts and early history. But it is simply untrue that the whole body of Oriental scholarship has made this kind of mistake. Take Said's claims about economic studies of Islamic countries. He condemns the work of Western observers

> whose economic ideas never extended beyond asserting the Oriental's fundamental incapacity for trade, commerce, and economic rationality. In the Islamic field those clichés held good for literally hundreds of years—until Maxime Rodinson's important study *Islam and Capitalism* appeared in 1966.

Anyone, however, who takes the trouble to read the one book he favors, *Islam and Capitalism*, will find it actually tells a different story. Rodinson is a Marxist sociologist and his work, like most in its mold, is based on secondary sources. A large section of the book is a debate with, and critique of, those Western economists and their Muslim allies who do not, in fact, see the Arabs as having an inherent "incapacity for trade," but instead regard these societies as capable of adopting capitalist commerce and industry. He discusses in some detail the work of six economic commentators who expressed views of this kind between the 1910s and the 1950s. Though Rodinson agrees there are many observers who share the as-

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sumptions identified by Said, and though his main aim is to see Islam adopt socialism, the evidence of his book is a clear refutation of Said's sweeping generalization about Orientalist economics. In a later work, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (1987), Rodinson dismisses the kind of homogeneity that Said wants to impose on Oriental Studies, insisting that the field has always included "a multiplicity of issues coming under the jurisdiction of many general disciplines."

Outside economic studies, Said's claims about the essentialism of Oriental Studies are just as misleading. Bernard Lewis has produced his own survey of European attitudes towards Islam since the Middle Ages, *Islam and the West* (1994). He argues that Europe's initial theological and ethnic prejudices had been largely overcome within serious scholarship by the end of the eighteenth century when the study of Islam was established as an academic subject worthy of attention and respect.

> The Muslims were no longer seen purely in ethnic terms as hostile tribes, but as the carriers of a distinctive religion and civilization; their prophet was no longer a grotesque impostor or a Christian heretic but the founder of an independent and historically significant religious community.

In other words, rather than being necessarily ethnocentric and racist, Oriental Studies was one of the first fields within European scholarship to overcome such prejudices and to open the Western mind to the whole of humanity.

Although each of the three components of Said's thesis is therefore untenable, this is unlikely in the short term to affect his status as an academic celebrity among students of literature and cultural studies in the West. He is not only one of those writers who helped create the current hegemony of identity-group politics and multiculturalism within the university system, but is also one of its chief beneficiaries. In accomplishing this, he has both endorsed the prevailing cult of the victim, upon which identity-group politics are based, and milked it himself to an indecent degree. "My own experiences of these matters," he says in *Orientalism*, "are in part what made me write this book."

> The life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening. There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental. The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny.

Coming from any grown man, such wallowing in victimhood would be bad enough, but from a tenured full professor at Columbia University in New York City—that is, from one of the most materially and occupationally privileged human beings on the planet, who enjoys the added indulgence of being permitted to make whatever criticism he fancies of the country that sustains him—it is simply embarrassing. It certainly calls into question the judgment of his more ardent admirers, especially Camille Paglia, who sees him as "an inspiring role model for a younger generation of critics seeking for their cultural identity."

In the East, however, Said is regarded today in quite different terms. While he acknowledges that translations of his book have won him support among Islamic fundamentalists who see him documenting the violation of Islam and the Arabs by a predatory West, he is much less of an influence in other circles. He has had a highly publicized falling out with the Palestine Liberation Organization, but a better indicator of the regard in which he is widely held would be the notice taken of his views on his own turf, as a cultural critic. It must be something of a disappointment to him to see his analysis of the European ar-

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rogance and Western prejudices purportedly built into Orientalist cultural artifacts being completely ignored. For instance, at the time he wrote his book in the late 1970s, about half of the nineteenth-century Orientalist art that was put to auction in London and Paris was being bought by dealers for Arab clients living in the West. Today, collectors of North African, Near and Middle Eastern descent totally dominate the market for these paintings, with Western and Japanese buyers all but priced out. Islamic collectors have voted with their petrodollars. Palaces and mansions throughout North Africa and the Persian Gulf are now liberally adorned with those same portrayals of their culture by Delacroix, Ingres, Gérôme, Deutsch, and others that Said and his followers claim are so demeaning. How could their owners be so mistaken? The Moroccan curator Brahim Alaoui has explained that, despite Said, the romantic portrayal of the nineteenth-century Orient by European artists is now regarded as a valued part of Arab and Islamic heritage.

> That image of the Orient which set the Occident dreaming in the nineteenth century returns something to those Orientals who also seek an image of their past. They find in this painting a world on its way to disappearing: this Orient that is highly colored, shimmering, this Orient of arabesques, of costumes, and the richness of forms is in the process of being eclipsed by a much more modern world. The image that was fixed by the Occident in the nineteenth century—the Orientals are now attempting to recover it.

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Poems
by Robert Mezey, Charles Tomlinson and Deborah Elliott Deutschman

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Laïs Dedicates to Aphroditê the Tools of Her Trade

After Plato

Words cannot say what she was in her prime,
This Laïs, now a specimen of Time.
She used to laugh to see so many men,
Not one of whom she'll ever see again.

Goddess, to you I yield my useless mirror—
What can it do but verify Time's error?
It will not show me as I used to be,
And what it will show I refuse to see.

—*Robert Mezey*

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Snowbound

for Jordi and Nuria

Now we have locked the doors against the snow
And feel it falling at each curtained window,
The house walls seem to thicken and resist
That movement into flocculence and mist,
Shapes that take the impression of the winds,
Scarving themselves around the gable-ends,
Or piling white oblivion on the stones
That once were ways, alternatives, directions
Refusing to become what they are now—
The unmapped territories of the falling snow.
But the room looms squarer as the tightening cold
Penetrates the fault-lines of our threshold:
Here, whiteness of the open book withstands
These long advances out of polar lands
To claim all for the north, that cannot find—
A roving presence, pathless, angered, blind—
The grain this hate of harvest would efface,
Our cell of fire beneath the blank of space.

—*Charles Tomlinson*

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Light: Clarence H. White's Photographs

But his real subject is light,
I realize, as I turn the pages
of this old book of Clarence White's photographs
I've come across by chance, here, looking around
this large rambling house, packed with art and books,
on a rainy summer afternoon in Connecticut
where I'm staying with friends for the weekend.
Grainy, pale black and white images
that evoke a whole, lost, distant world—of light.

For instance, here in this still life:
the objects simply disappear.
Light and shadows curve into a torso,
then swirl into other sculptural forms
and momentarily settle
into a backdrop whorl of light,
before diffusing into something else.

Or, in this one:
slightly blurred, off-focus, light-struck—
the streaks of white flowers blown
across a summer field could be snow.
And as I keep turning the pages, I see images
that are now not even memories.
Of seasons, and scenery, and people.
Posing in their summer-white clothes.

Young men, in suits with vests and pocket watches,
their eyes burning with the myths of youth;
older men with paunches and jowls,
reflecting their well-fed, prosperous state.
And women, with parasols, in gowns of chiffon clouds.
Diaphanous, ethereal apparitions of an age
that wanted to remain in a purely imaginary realm.
On summer lawns and riverbanks and in meadows.

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And fawnlike children, who flow
against the liquid, perhaps gold-green, smoked light
of the summer foliage at dusk.
Orchards and fields, viewed through the stained glass
windows of small-town churches,
in the turn-of-the-century Midwest.

And a few large-city scenes to document the New Age
that is about to replace all this.
One, where a ship seems to float,
shimmering with light, in the evening mist,
at the end of a pale, empty street.

The light that is always there—
outlining forms and structures into relief,
highlighting certain parts and simply removing others.

And as I keep looking, trying to decipher,
some of the images caught by his lens—
picnics, summer games, small-town streets
with white wooden houses and storefronts with signs—
take on the lexicography of dreams,
the mnemonic of another, parallel world
that is still here,
though it has long ago vanished.

As now, looking at these images, this moment,
also, is slowly becoming part of the invisible
country of the ongoing past,
we are always on our way toward.
Here, where we are so briefly, in the light.

—Deborah Elliott Deutschman

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Theater

Flat-footed Wolfe

by Mark Steyn

Traditionally, the theater has been none too expert in what's known in Hollywood as "synergy," but this season it's doing its best to see that every major play comes with an accompanying tie-in news story. As with, say, the Burger King family value meals and animated action figures designed to promote a new dinosaur film, you can't help feeling that the tie-ins are actually rather more satisfying than the products they're meant to be tying in to. As I mentioned last month, there's more truth about contemporary American gayness in the controversy surrounding *Corpus Christi* than in the play itself. Likewise, although every character in Jonathan Larson's *Rent* is an artist, or "artist," of some sort—video artist, performance artist, lesbian artist—its pieties about art and community in the East Village wither alongside the accompanying legal dispute, in which a dramaturge has been suing for her share of the many millions this show has brought in since Larson dropped dead a week before opening.

Lynn Thomson, dramaturge of the New York Theatre Workshop, sat in the room with Larson, restructured his script with him, and wound up writing—*writing*—new material for the play. None of this matters much when you're in rehearsal in some pokey little theater downtown: what's the point of arguing about your rightful percentage of the royalties, when, in strict dollars and cents, a percentage of zip, nada, diddly is still zip, nada, diddly? It's not talked about much, but dramaturges do this all the time, especially at not-for-profits. So many of the available grants are for subjects (plays on Asian-American themes) or authors (Hispanic playwrights) or audiences (transgendered community outreach) that many theaters, for sound financial reasons, wind up taking on unstageable plays by people who are not, in any reliable sense of the word, writers. It falls to the dramaturge to take a piece of wretched, incoherent garbage on an approved theme and turn it into a piece of mediocre coherent garbage. But, even by these low standards, Jonathan Larson's script for *Rent* was unproduceable, and Miss Thomson wound up writing sections and reorganizing others in the manner of what, on any other musical, would be called a "book writer" and be worth two royalty points.

Maybe her pal Larson, who wasn't doing too much other writing in this period, would have gotten around to putting their arrangement in writing himself. Instead, he died, and when *The New York Times* got behind *Rent* and millions started pouring in, Larson's family decided that they had no desire to share it with Miss Thomson—or, indeed, even to give her her due as dramaturge on the title page of the *Playbill*. So Larson wound up with a posthumous Pulitzer and a Tony, and Miss Thomson got zero, pending a final legal resolution. There's more drama in this story and more fully fleshed-out characters—Thomson, Lar-

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son's parents—than are up on stage in Larson's play. The feel-good fuzziness of *Rent* has been, well, rent.

The latest theatrical story to make the news section was the decision of Livent, "North America's largest live theatre company," to file for bankruptcy protection, sack its founders, Garth Drabinsky and Myron Gottlieb, and sue them for $225 million for fraud. Livent is the producer of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *Ragtime*—both by *Corpus Christi*'s Terrence McNally—as well as recent revivals of *Show Boat* and *Candide*. But most of its creativity, it seems, was reserved for its accounting practices. Instead of earning $25 million between 1994 and 1997, as it reported, Livent just between 1996 and June 30, 1998 managed to lose $138 million. Drabinsky is a Toronto impresario (don't laugh) who inclined more to the Napoleonic delusions of old-time Broadway showmen—producers like David (*Madam Butterfly*) Belasco, who received his visitors dressed as a Catholic priest, or Abe (*Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*) Erlanger, who, according to P. G. Wodehouse, never accepted a play unless it met with the approval of a twelve-year-old boy whom he kept on the payroll because he believed he had exactly the intelligence of the average American theatergoer. (He'd be down to a seven-year-old today.)

However, to make it big on the Great White Way, Drabinsky came up with what struck even some of us who never saw his accounts as a curious strategy. Last year, Toronto, a medium-sized North American city, cobbled together a lot of tiny surrounding boroughs like Etobicoke and Mississauga and declared itself the world's first "mega-city." In the same way, Livent somehow figured that if you produced enough piffling non-hits they would somehow collectively add up to one big mega-smash entertainment empire. Alas for Drabinsky, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is the Etobicoke of musicals and *Ragtime* the Mississauga. *Candide* failed on Broadway, the three touring companies of *Show Boat* flopped, *Fosse* opened recently to dud reviews. . . . There's only so long you can go on losing money at everything.

Bernard Gersten of Lincoln Center, co-producer with Livent of the soon-to-open *Parade*, calls the company's collapse "theater's Monica Lewinsky"—by which I think he means that it's a media obsession unrelated to the "real issues." But, as with the Clinton scandals, there are a few human casualties along the way. In November, after filing for bankruptcy protection, the company earned more than $4 million (Canadian) in operating profits. But, in addition to refusing refunds for tickets to cancelled shows at the Ford Centre (the Toronto one: it also owns Ford Centers in New York and Chicago), it bounced a check for $23,700 sent to St. Michael's College School for tickets sold at a recent fundraiser the school held at the theater. "I think they have no right to keep that money," said Father Thomas Mohan. "We need it. Boy, it took an awful lot of work to make that money."

So, on the one hand, we have a company that mawkishly wallows in its sympathy for the little man, the solidarity with the masses that seeps through most Livent works but especially *Ragtime*, with its brutal scenes of strike-busting by heartless capitalists. And, on the other, we have a company that steals the ticket receipts from a charity fundraiser for a small religious school. As with *Corpus Christi* and *Rent*, when nature suddenly holds up a mirror to art, art's own reflections on the subject are reduced to platitudinous humbug. In what's proving to be a disappointing New York season, we should be grateful for the drama offstage.

In their own way, though, theater folk are at least as naïvely trusting as that Catholic school. They wanted to believe in "Garth Vader," as *Variety* likes to call him, because, when you've had fifteen years of being kicked around by creepy un-Broadway types like Andrew Lloyd Webber, even a Canadian starts to look like the great white hope: a hands-on creative impresario in the glorious American tradition. The theater misses producers; it pines for the days of Jed Har-

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ris, who gave Broadway *The Front Page*, *Our Town*, and much else and, as a part of his philosophy of calculated intimidation, wasn't above hosting production meetings entirely nude. (On one such occasion, George S. Kaufman made no comment until the end, when he turned back from the door and said, "Oh, Jed, your fly's open.") Harris was a monster of such proportions that he was the direct inspiration both for Laurence Olivier's Richard III and Disney's Big Bad Wolf. At the age of 28, he had four of the biggest hits in town. But, by the time he died in 1979, he was broke.

The producers, such as they were, were the first to bail out of the new *On the Town*. After the New York Shakespeare Festival's revival played its al fresco run at the Delacorte in Central Park in the summer of 1997, they were supposed to take it to Broadway. But, in place of Jerome Robbins's thrilling dances, there was now the "experimental choreography" of Eliot Feld, who seemed mostly to be experimenting with putting the audience to sleep. So the director, and head of the Shakespeare Festival, George C. Wolfe, dumped Feld and determined to press on with restoring a show he adores to its rightful place on the main stem. The New York papers have been full of horror stories bleeding out from the show's tortuous path back to Broadway: the new choreographer, Christopher d'Amboise, lasted two months; then Kenneth Young, a modern dance type who's choreographed Madonna videos (who hasn't?) signed on; but he'd never done a musical before, so, just before opening, Joey McKneely from *The Life* was brought in as dance-doctor to fix the ballets. Throughout these comings and goings, the word was that, in sinking $6 million into this revival and letting the New York Shakespeare Festival single-handedly take on the burdens supposed to be assumed by their departed Broadway producers, Wolfe was jeopardizing one of the city's most important theatrical centers for an ill-fated and inappropriate commercial venture.

In fact, the only mistake Wolfe's made is to promote himself from director to director-producer. That's not a good hyphenate. A producer's job is to question the director, and a director is usually too busy questioning everyone else—and sacking choreographers—to do the job effectively himself. Most of what's wrong with *On The Town* flows from Wolfe, whose recent Broadway transfers include *The Tempest* and *Bring In 'Da Noise, Bring In 'Da Funk*, not being pushed hard enough.

On the Town (now at the Gershwin) opens at dawn and closes the following dawn, presenting in between a day in the life of New York as glimpsed through the eyes of three sailors on leave. It was first seen in 1944, a period when musical theater was getting grown-up ideas. The five Broadway novices behind *On the Town*—symphonic conductor Leonard Bernstein, the Greenwich Village revue act Comden and Green, ballet choreographer Jerome Robbins, and designer Oliver Smith—were no exception. "There was a phrase that was around at that time," their director George Abbot, the only experienced hand on the team, once told me. "'The integrated musical.' And they lived by it."

Actually, one of the great pleasures of *On the Town* is that it isn't *that* integrated—not in the way that the previous year's *Oklahoma* is, where, as Richard Rodgers liked to put it, the orchestrations sound the way the costumes look. *On the Town* is composed of what would, by Rodgers and Hammerstein rules, seem contradictory elements: a wisecracking book, long ballets, comic songs, and extended instrumental symphonic passages. But it exemplifies the best kind of American open-mindedness from the period—the idea that you can have snappy gags followed by a ballet, and that an audience will appreciate both on their own terms. Nobody would do that now. In that sense, although Bernstein's *West Side Story* has a Shakespearean source, it's *On the Town* that has a Shakespearean spirit—verse, masques, tragedy, and lowbrow yuks all jostling side by side.

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Unfortunately, the combination of talents that came together in 1944 is not easily matched fifty-four years later. First of all, if, like Wolfe, you decide to junk the Robbins choreography, what do you put in its place? The show has an awful lot of ballets and you have to do something with them or the play dribbles away. *On the Town* began life as a ballet—Robbins's and Bernstein's *Fancy Free*—and dance is its spirit. But it seems from the grade of choreographer Wolfe hired that he was looking for a subordinate. If so, he succeeded: there is nothing in Young's or McKneely's or whoever they are's contributions to warrant the prominence and time they receive in the show. The dance passages are supposed to deepen the moment, to transport us beyond the quickfire dialogue. But the dancing is entirely forgettable and fatally unconnected to character or situation. A producer would not have let George Wolfe open this show with those dances: it can't work.

But the rest of the show's problems are Wolfe's responsibility directly. Betty Comden and Adolph Green's three sailors are not exactly strongly delineated. They're not even three types, except insofar as they're defined by the women they're hooked up with: Miss Turnstiles, the winner of the subway system's commuting-cutie-of-the-month award; an anthropologist Claire De Loone; and Hildy, a ferocious lady cab driver—that's to say, beauty, brains, and balls. Structurally, the show's characters get more rounded the less we see of them: minor one-scene nobodies are more fully formed than the three girlfriends, who in turn resonate far more sharply than the three sailors. I think that's because, in 1944, the sailors were intended to be *any* sailors—your boyfriend, or pal, or nephew, just any old gob packing a lifetime into twenty-four hours. The war is the context. At the end, all six sing one of Bernstein, Comden, and Green's most beguiling ballads, an accumulation of the things they never got around to doing together—and a rueful sign-off, "Oh, well, we'll catch up/ Some Other Time." The war isn't mentioned but the song unobtrusively enlarges the situation: we understand that, as the trio reboard their ship, "Some Other Time" may never come.

But the other reason that the sailors aren't more sharply drawn is because they're not the main characters: the city is. *On the Town* is the first of Comden and Green's many valentines to New York—or rather to a particular view of the city, one in which gags and ballet and poetry are all a part of the pulse of the town. It's caught in the very first moments. The famous "New York, New York (a helluva town)" is not quite the opening number: that honor goes to a lazy aubade sung by a group of stevedores—"I Feel Like I'm Not Out of Bed Yet." And even as they're still semi-operatically yawning and stretching, the orchestra explodes, the sailors hit the ground, and "New York, New York" bursts into life in all its wonderful, brassy exhilaration. If that opening doesn't get you, nothing will.

What follows at the Gershwin is flat-footed and lackluster. As Hildy, Lea DeLaria is a sledgehammer presence who only points up the dullards elsewhere in the cast—like Tai Jiminez's vapid Miss Turnstiles, and Perry Laylon Ojeda, who's given the richest, most haunting song in the score—"Lonely Town"—and can't sing it. What a waste. After the number was cut from the 1949 film by Arthur Freed, who thought Bernstein's music too difficult, Sinatra took to introducing it in concert by raining down a thousand curses on Freed for denying him the chance to sing it on screen. Wolfe leaves the song in but gives it to someone who's practically inaudible.

The inadequacy of Wolfe's casting is especially exposed because he doesn't have anything to say about the show. Although he claims to be trying to bring alive the spirit of 1944, the assumed context of the original production—the war—appears not to interest him. Instead, he wants to bring alive the show's unusually youthful energy (all the creators were in their twenties) with a cast that reflects the "multicultural tapestry" of today's New York. This is fine in

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theory, but almost all the performers seem bemused by the sensibility of the material—not least the comedy. Much of the time, they speak the lines as if they've no very clear idea what they mean.

Still, the New York Shakespeare Festival isn't short of valentines to the big town these days. Downtown at the Shiva Theatre (part of the Joseph Papp Public Theatre), Wolfe, wearing his producer's hat, is presenting *Stop Kiss*, a new play written by Diana Son and staged by Jo Bonney that's the nearest to a hot ticket this season: after three previews, it more or less sold out the rest of its run. The play is a kind of Nineties version not so much of *On the Town* as of *Wonderful Town*, the New York show Bernstein, Comden, and Green wrote a decade later. Those New Yorkers alarmed by the Blandsville that Mayor Giuliani and the Disneyfiers over on Times Square are turning the Big Apple into will be reassured to find that Miss Son's vision of the city is of a dank, brooding swamp whose fragile civilization can easily be swallowed up by darker forces all around. Somebody actually says "I love New York," but the pause and the inflection make it sound kinky, like a sexual secret.

I suspect the reason for the boffo box-office is the play's central event: a sort of lesbian-bashing. One woman kisses another woman and gets brutally beaten. The assault and the subsequent police investigation punctuate scenes of light, observational comedy which are the merest updates on Ruth and Eileen apartment-sharing in *Wonderful Town*. This time round, though, Callie and Sara are not sisters, but thirtyish flatmates who slowly discover that they're attracted to each other. Personally, I'm a bit lesbianed-out these days, so my main interest in the play was Callie's occupation: she's a helicopter traffic reporter for a New York radio station. When I first heard about this aspect of the play, I assumed it was a framing device—just as *On the Town*'s twenty-four-hour clock is. To be up in the sky every day watching traffic stream in and out through the tunnels, across the bridges, fanning out to the suburbs beyond, to be able to watch the blood pump through the municipal arteries like that must give you a particular insight into the rhythms of the city. If you live in the country, as I do, the unchanging incantations of the traffic reports—"Twenty minutes inbound at the Holland" or (my favorite in London) "Contraflow in the Hanger Lane giratory system"—have a mysterious allure. I'd hoped Miss Son and Callie might make something of her privileged view of city life, but sadly not: like most things here, it's just an excuse for sitcom jokes. However, as Callie and Sara, there are two perfectly pitched, complementary performances by Jessica Hecht and Sandra Oh. Why doesn't George Wolfe maintain the same casting standards in the Public's musicals?

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Art

Duchamp & Cornell

by Mario Naves

The most striking thing about the exhibition "Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp . . . in resonance" is its catalogue.[1] Expertly designed and lavishly illustrated, it contains photographic reproductions that are almost as good as being there. The book's eye-catching layout is matched by the meticulousness of its essays, artists' chronologies, and inventory of work. What makes the catalogue truly noticeable, however, is its heft. While 344 pages may not earn it phone book status, the catalogue is nevertheless a major tome, one whose size is in contrast to the exhibition it elucidates. For "in resonance" is an intimate show, occupying a single gallery at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It delineates the correspondence, both personal and artistic, between these two singular artists, who also happened to be friends, and, by comparing and contrasting works by both men, the show strikes some telling parallels. "In resonance" is, in short, a specialist's show given a major treatment.

The centerpiece—indeed, the *raison d'être*—of "in resonance" is a collection of Duchamp-related ephemera, the so-called Duchamp Dossier, gathered by Joseph Cornell (1903–1972) and discovered in his home after his death. The Dossier is being exhibited here for the first time, having been given to the museum by the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation in 1990. It contains the odds-and-ends of a friendship: crumpled dry cleaning bills, a coaster for Trommer's malt beer ("Taste . . . and compare!"), receipts from Bloomingdale's, invitations from the Julian Levy Gallery, thank-you notes from Duchamp's girlfriend Mary Reynolds, and over a hundred other items Cornell tucked away in his studio. Whether Duchamp was aware of this endeavor is unknown, as is whether Cornell intended it to be a work of art. There is reason to believe that the latter might be the case, because the dossier—literally, a file of documents—was a format Cornell pursued and exhibited during his lifetime. Still, there is something unseemly about poring over the contents of the Duchamp Dossier. It's as if one were surreptitiously rifling through the drawer of an acquaintance's desk.

Then again, unseemliness has always been a characteristic of Cornell's art. His best known works, small-scale dioramas referred to as "boxes," encapsulate private fantasies whose intensity verges on the unhealthy. The evocative power of the boxes owes much to Cornell's preternatural gift for transforming the mundane and, in fact, the

1 "Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp . . . in resonance" opened at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on October 8, 1998 and will remain on view until January 3, 1999. The exhibition will reopen at the Menil Collection, Houston on January 22, 1999 and be on view through May 16. A catalogue has been published by Cantz Verlag in association with the museums (344 pages, $65, $46 paper).

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fetishistic into scenarios of uncanny grace. These compendiums of junk-shop curios, sci-fi gizmos, and countless other knick-knacks are mystical and laconic. Yet as private as Cornell's boxes are, they aren't hermetic. We are entranced by this world of reliquaries, their dead-end lyricism having been made compellingly concrete. Cornell buttressed a fey brand of romanticism by fixing its components in contained spaces; his "boxing" of objects harnessed their associative capacity. Cornell's art, clinical and cryptic, is the most poignant manifestation of the Surrealist impulse in twentieth-century art.

The question "in resonance" begs is how representative is the Duchamp Dossier of Cornell's art. In the catalogue, Ecke Bonk posits the Dossier as "a re/minder of our quintessential amnesia: the unforeseeable turbulences of the centripetal and centrifugal dynamics of cultural oblivion . . . as the vortexes of deletion and frequent chance-operations control the re/dis/coursing." To rework the old joke, inside every convoluted sentence is a concise one waiting to get out. Still, there *is* something to Bonk's "dynamics of cultural oblivion," particularly as it applies to the deadpan nostalgia of Cornell's boxes. In regard to the Duchamp Dossier, however, such portentous jargon serves as camouflage for what is, in the end, an artistic non-event. That Cornell was capable of endowing junk with magic is true enough. The refuse he salvaged from Duchamp's trashbin, however, remains just that. There is a difference between odds-and-ends that have been shaped to conform to an artistic vision and those scattered in a dead artist's studio.

Truth be told, the dossier format was, in artistic terms, an incidental part of Cornell's oeuvre. The dossier had its genesis in Cornell's files of assemblage material—his so-called "spare parts department." This format obviously had great import for Cornell and, so he thought, for others as well: his intention of making editions of dossiers available for sale at Woolworth's is touchingly naïve. Yet even when he was able to bring dossier projects to fruition, like the one dedicated to the actress Lauren Bacall, there clings to it a sweaty-palmed fervor that is unsavory. *Penny Arcade Portrait of Lauren Bacall (Working Model Based Upon "To Have and Have Not")* c. 1945–70, with its movie magazine cut-outs and personal notes, confirms an obsession rather than transforms it. Of course, obsession goes some way in explaining the conviction of Cornell's vision; with the dossiers, however, it results in artifacts that are cloistered and a bit scary. (In the catalogue, Cornell's fixations earn him a comparison with a stalker.) Cornell's dossiers are the documents of an inscrutable personality. They never thrive as art.

So how come Cornell's boxes do? How do they transcend mere object status? His boxes are, after all, assemblages of unapologetic stuff. They can't be considered painting and are only sculptural in the sense that they (barely) occupy three dimensions. Cornell's boxes reside in their own distinctive niche in the not altogether happy history of assemblage. For what assemblage has done, ultimately, is to negate illusion, plugging the metaphoric conduit through which we experience art. Constructions made of actual objects have not brought us an art closer to—as the current parlance has it—the real world. Quite the opposite: it has left a legacy of mute and blunt things. Consider the trajectory of assemblage or, if you will, "art as object"—from Duchamp's readymades to Rauschenberg's combines, from Keinholz's sleazy tableaux to the latest permutation of installation art—and you have an artform whose physicality is as unyielding as its impact is fleeting. Cornell's art is a part of this story. Yet we don't experience the dull thud of novelty with his boxes the way we do with other art that has been appropriated from second-hand sources. How, then, did Cornell get away with it?

The initial response is that he didn't get away with anything at all. Such a conceit is more applicable to the cynical calculations of a jaded avant-garde than to the fragile

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logic of Cornell's art. A friend suggested to me that what makes the boxes special—why they succeed as art—is their sincerity. Now, one is tempted to reply that if sincerity were the paramount criterion of art then the world would be blessed with a deluge of masterpieces. Yet sincerity is a vital factor in Cornell's art. Were he not absolutely convinced by the wonder of his own bizarre universe, would we consider the boxes seriously at all? Such fervid conviction is usually the domain of the folk artist and there is something of the outsider to Cornell's conglomerations of oddments, as well as in his relationship with the world at large. Still, not many oddballs who give body to their own peculiar reality achieve the kind of lyricism that Cornell did.

Although Cornell never strayed far from Flushing, he was no backwoods—or, should one say, outer borough—rube: Cornell's gift and unique brand of worldliness did, after all, propel him into the New York avant-garde. I suspect that what most helped his art achieve its transformative potential is the chosen format, the box. Each box creates a time and space that obliquely resembles our own. Their intimate scale invites us to focus on the minutiae, both physical and metaphorical, of their making. It is a kind of poetic pinball: images reverberate and escalate, albeit gently, within the rigid constraints of their own cosmos. With a glass panel serving as a divider between Cornell's universe and our own, the objects in his boxes never—how does one put it?—violate our space; they remain firmly ensconced inside their own otherworldly dominion. We are invited to look *in* at Cornell's world. His space is not unlike that of the display cases found in the Museum of Natural History: simulated environments that give us access to a world that we may not otherwise experience. Condensing history, science, memory, and childhood into a 15½ × 11¼ × 4⅛ inch container, Cornell's genius was in giving otherwise dumb objects life as art.

The life of art is an ideal that stands in contradistinction to the work of Cornell's confrere Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). It's not hard to see why these two men were attracted to each other. Duchamp must have appreciated Cornell's eccentricity and Cornell Duchamp's world-weary urbanity; both shared a love of objects. With this show we learn that Duchamp hired Cornell to assist in the construction of his *Boîtes-en-valise*, the "portable museums" that served as overviews of his oeuvre and included miniature reproductions of Duchamp's art. Cornell must have been honored to assist the Dadaist master, and enamored of the notion of summing up a life of art inside a suitcase. Still, if it seems that I have given short shrift to Duchamp, it is because "in resonance" displays all too clearly his shortcomings as an artist. This isn't, in all probability, what the organizers of the exhibition had in mind—certainly not at a host institution that holds the most important Duchamp collection in the world. But there is more intrigue, awe, and soul—in short, art—to Cornell's *Palace* (c. 1943), a ghostly evocation of architecture and place, than there is to any one of Duchamp's nihilistic "masterpieces" found just a short jaunt up the stairs in the Philadelphia Museum. If Cornell gave life to "the dynamics of cultural oblivion," then Duchamp left us with a culture *of* oblivion. "In resonance" traces the strange camaraderie that existed between Cornell and Duchamp. Biographers of both artists will love it. The rest of us, however, will leave the show wondering how this loner from Queens did what he did and hope that a retrospective is in the works.

Exhibition note

"Bob Thompson" at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
September 25, 1998–January 3, 1999

For some years, promises of a full-scale Bob Thompson exhibit tantalized those of us interested in the work of this talented, self-destructive, and all-too-short-lived African-American painter. (Yes, another one.)

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A show finally materialized this fall, offering a welcome opportunity to take stock of what Thompson managed to pack into a brief eight years as an intensely serious, full-time painter. He died in Rome in 1966, just short of his twenty-ninth birthday—exactly the same age as Frédéric Bazille when he was killed in the Franco-Prussian war and a year older than Jean-Michel Basquiat when he, like Thompson, died of a drug overdose.

Comparisons here are, I suppose, inevitable. Like Basquiat, Thompson was not only a confirmed fan of illegal substances, but also achieved a great deal of success, at least by the more modest standards of the 1960s art world, while remarkably young: a series of solo shows in several well-regarded New York galleries, favorable attention from critics and collectors, and a contract with the prestigious Martha Jackson Gallery—all by the time he was twenty-six. Unlike Basquiat, though, Thompson was a deeply committed, enthusiastic, wholly unironic painter with an informed sense of connection to the great tradition of Western painting. His ambition seems to have been focused on what he could achieve in his art, not on media-driven notions of fame and glamour.

Thompson was a natural storyteller who quickly found his voice, developing a language of brilliant, almost harsh, saturated hues, thick paint, and blocky structures, and recruiting a cast of stylized characters, both human and fantastic, to enact his private dramas. Not surprisingly, since Thompson was still discovering himself as an artist when he died, his chosen ancestors are plainly visible. There are echoes of German Expressionism and even stronger echoes of a German-born artist closer to Thompson's own generation, the visionary Jan Müller, in his loaded surfaces, "primitive" imagery, and full-throttle color. There are also overtones of Bay Area expressionist figuration, especially the vigorous, gestural nudes of David Park. But whatever their relationship to their antecedents, Thompson's best pictures, with their gutsy silhouettes, sensual paint-handling, and ominous implied narratives, are impressive.

The Whitney show confirmed that Thompson's strongest works marry firm abstract structure to haunting, otherworldly images almost drowned in paint. It confirmed, too, that his smaller pictures are often more convincing than his large ones and that he can often wrest more power from a muted palette than a super-heated one. In his last years, Thompson was working assiduously to come to terms with an envious passion for Old Master painting—a passion inflamed by extended periods of time in Europe toward the end of his life. When he died, Thompson was several years into an attempt to adapt the Old Master compositions he admired most to his personal narratives, trying to make the architecture of Poussin and Titian and Piero della Francesca resound with improvised jazz riffs. In most of these, Thompson's imaginary vernacular images never become congruent with the iconic structures they are forced to inhabit, but in some a familiar, time-honored composition is invigorated by Thompson's brilliant palette and broadly drawn figures.

These pictures, of course, are extremely incorrect. According to modern-day ghettoizing standards, Thompson should have stuck exclusively to the African-American cultural references that weave in and out of his pictures, most explicitly, perhaps, in *Garden of Music* (1960, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford), a multi-racial paradise populated by his jazz musician heros. African-American artists are not supposed to embrace the (white European male dominated) canon of Western painting, except ironically. Thompson's work, from first to last, is a whole-hearted celebration of the potency of painting—with a capital "P" but without qualifying, categorizing adjectives. The sad part is, of course, that we'll never know where his fierce, energetic pictures might have led.

—*Karen Wilkin*

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Music

Le nozze di Susanna

by David Mermelstein

The greatness in great art lies in its flexibility. Many things can entertain or even stimulate within the narrow confines of a particular context, but great works of art—be they paintings or plays, sculptures or symphonies—transcend limitations. They reveal different things at different times. In the world of opera, Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* ("The Marriage of Figaro") stands at the summit of achievement, a work so perfect, so inspired and heartfelt, so gloriously engaging that it is almost impossible to do it violence. It is, of course, frequently staged and as a result has been at the mercy of numerous operatic fads. Yet the work has faced such slings and arrows bravely. Indeed, it seems that no matter how outré the production, Mozart's sparkling music and Lorenzo da Ponte's scintillating libretto come through unscathed, immune, as it were, to the vagaries of opera directors looking to make a name for themselves.

There are reasons for this resilience. *Figaro* is based on Beaumarchais's celebrated play *La folle journée, ou Le Mariage de Figaro*, and, until Verdi at least, no opera was built on a more solid foundation. It helps that the play lays its own claim to greatness, if not absolutely for its comic content than for its historic significance as a harbinger of revolution. But Mozart and da Ponte transformed Beaumarchais's work, enriching its humanity, toning down its political content, and further shading its compelling characters. Primarily, this feat was accomplished through music, but one mustn't sell da Ponte, or his libretto, short, for much of this opera's beauty is textual. It is da Ponte's libretto that bears the brunt of the excesses piled upon *Figaro* when directors choose to reset the action radically or reimagine its delicate scheme. (We won't speak here of the castle of Aguas Frescas recast as Trump Tower by Peter Sellars.) So it was with considerable relief, if not quite joy, that one beheld the Metropolitan Opera's new production of *Le nozze di Figaro* in October.

Directed by Jonathan Miller, the production boasted a cast that might have made even denizens of the Old Met swoon: the bass-baritone Bryn Terfel as Figaro, the mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli as Susanna, the soprano Renée Fleming as Countess Almaviva, the baritone Dwayne Croft as Count Almaviva, and the mezzo Susanne Mentzer as Cherubino. The supporting singers were also distinguished. And, as ever, the conductor James Levine and his players gave fresh life to Mozart's score. There was, in fact, enough good in this production to make objections, regardless of how legitimate they are, seem like quibbles. For beyond the all-star cast's excellent singing and the supple playing of the Met orchestra, there was something extraordinary about this *Figaro*. That something was Cecilia Bartoli—or, more precisely, it was the way in which Bartoli's Susanna dominated the action.

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It is true, as many reviews have already made clear, that Bartoli offered an exceedingly vivacious portrait of the Countess's maid. Her earthy antics were certainly attention-getting, sometimes even bordering on buffoonery. She did shamelessly mug. But she was also utterly charming. With a Figaro no less enamored of the spotlight than she, could anyone really blame Bartoli for seizing her fair share of the audience's favor? On opening night (when Bartoli sang Susanna's standard arias rather than the far-less-favored alternates she opted for later in the run), the chemistry between Figaro and Susanna was, well, explosive. Terfel and Bartoli couldn't keep their hands off each other, and the obvious, yet totally unselfconscious, affection they communicated enhanced the comedy no end. Here was Terfel's Figaro, seated, pulling Bartoli's Susanna onto his lap; there was Bartoli's Susanna playfully smacking Terfel's Figaro about. To top it off, the zaftig singers made a good physical match.

None of this is incidental information, for, whether by design or happy accident, Bartoli's effusive Susanna forced audiences to consider the opera with her and Terfel at its center, i.e., with Figaro and Susanna, not the Count and Countess Almaviva, as its protagonists. That is no small achievement when one is competing against a Countess of such innate grace as Fleming's. And it is a significant shift from the way the opera has been perceived of late, with the Countess's abandonment by her husband as the primary plot point. In Miller's production—or should one, perhaps, refer to it as Bartoli's production?—Figaro and Susanna's nuptials, and the attempts to delay them, drive the action. Such an approach is, in effect, a throwback to Beaumarchais's play, in which Susanna's (or, more accurately, Suzanne's) machinations command our interest to a far greater degree.

Bartoli's role in this process mustn't be minimized. In the fall of 1997, at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco, I saw a first-rate production of *Figaro* with a superb cast. Terfel was the Figaro, portraying the barber-cum-manservant pretty much as he did at the Met. The Susanna was the fine soprano Sylvia McNair. Unlike Bartoli, however, she did not attempt to compete with Terfel's bluff characterization. As a result, the relationship between Susanna and Figaro seemed no more important than many other situations in the opera. The page Cherubino's flirtation with the Countess, the Count's attempts to bed Susanna, the reunion between the orphaned Figaro and his birth parents (Marcellina and Bartolo) all laid claim to the viewer's attention. Because of Bartoli, this new production restored a proper sense of proportion to the opera. The work's title does, after all, suggest that the marriage of Figaro and Susanna is at the heart of things. (One can't help but wonder how this staging will fare when the Susanna is someone other than the Italian mezzo, though.)

With Miller directing, there were other points to be made, even if they proved far less significant. Miller enjoys a reputation as one of present-day opera's most inspired minds, yet it's unclear why. His productions—too conservative to be termed avant-garde, yet too full of pretentious imagery to be labeled faithful—are weighed down by predictability and irrelevance, and those dubious hallmarks were much present in this *Figaro*. For Almaviva's castle, Aguas Frescas, Miller, in collaboration with the set designer Peter Davison, opted for a spare look, with the rooms stripped of their paint and varnish. Was Miller trying to tell us something? That here was the human comedy sans artifice, perhaps. Or maybe the dilapidated rooms were meant to connote some sort of internal rot presaging the French Revolution. *Après nous, le déluge*. What's odd is that Miller didn't extend the analogy to James Acheson's sumptuous, vibrant costumes, which looked splendid. Were audiences, then, to suppose that institutions were corrupt and ravaged but not people? Who knows? Miller seems never to have made up his own mind about what he wanted to say, much less sent out a clear signal to operagoers.

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There were other problems as well. In an ill-advised and distracting attempt at verisimilitude, the director brought hounds onto the stage. More disturbing was Miller's setting the last act's thwarted rendezvous on the steps of what looked like Versailles's Petit Trianon, rather than in the park-like setting both Beaumarchais and da Ponte prescribed. The change transformed the sublime comic antics that da Ponte and Mozart envisioned into an ersatz Feydeau farce. Miller's tinkering robbed the finale of its idyllic location, an appreciable loss when one considers that "Contessa perdono!" was uttered by a contrite Count kneeling on cold stone. The simulated fireworks that followed, and the Countess's sudden appearance in a white gown right out of *Angels in America*, only added to the heavyhandedness.

Despite these flaws, so much in this production emerged right. The singing was as good as it gets these days. One could hardly have wished for a more dynamic central couple than Terfel and Bartoli. As a mezzo, Bartoli was an unusual choice for Susanna—the role usually goes to a soprano. But the part's tessitura did not prove a challenge for this resourceful singer. She was secure at the top, rich in the middle, and firm at the bottom. The role was in many ways a perfect fit. Bartoli's exaggerated characterization may not have been to everyone's taste (though she won me over completely), but no one could contest that she dominated her every scene. Terfel proved her perfect partner. Already the Welsh bass-baritone has come to claim this role like no singer since Cesare Siepi. His hearty portrayal made Figaro tough not to love, and his smoothly robust voice was a constant source of pleasure.

In any other production, Renée Fleming would have been the first singer mentioned, for she possesses an alluring stage presence and a pleasing voice. Here, she adopted a cool but sympathetic persona, outwardly fragile but steeled by inner strength. Her singing, too, was winning, particularly her moving account of "Dove sono," the Act III aria in which the Countess laments the loss of her husband's love but reserves hope that it may be recaptured. Dwayne Croft, a Met regular, may be less of a star than the three other members of this opera's central quartet, but he was hardly out of place in such company. He played the Count as a virile rake, leonine in his silk dressing gown. The bit of grit in his voice lent his singing extra bite. Looking for all the world like a young Frederica von Stade, Susanne Mentzer made a strong impression as Cherubino, the amorous page. The mezzo, a natural in this trouser role, delivered her arias with apt ardor and subtle characterization. The supporting cast members did not disappoint, either, but tenor Heinz Zednik's Basilio, attired in purple with flaming red hair, was especially dear.

Levine and the orchestra supported the singers's every phrase eloquently. From the opening bars of the overture, the conductor, adopting a brisk but not speedy pace, achieved a striking, and much desired, balance between strings and winds. That equipoise was never compromised, nor were the singers ever overwhelmed.

It's not often that one goes to the opera, dislikes much about a production, and still comes home singing its praises. Yet this was one time when to do anything less would have been churlish. That Bartoli, thanks to her unusual exuberance, proved the chief agent of this situation is to her credit, but reveling in this opera's virtues is a never-ending project. Mozart and da Ponte were nothing if not operatic sorcerers, and, in the end, it is the composer's touching strains and the librettist's wise seriocomic text that overwhelm us again and again.

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Two at City Opera

by Alexander Coleman

The New York City Opera continues its year-long season with a varied combination of revivals of past productions and eight new stagings under the artistic direction of Paul Kellogg, now in his second year as General and Artistic Director. One revival and one new production in this first half of the season were of particular interest: the revival of Leos Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, sung in English with set and costumes created from designs by Maurice Sendak, and a new version (in co-production with the Glimmerglass Opera) of Carlisle Floyd's 1970 setting of John Steinbeck's 1937 novella *Of Mice and Men*.

This company can always be counted on for invigorating the repertory. It is not that they ignore a *Butterfly* or a *Rigoletto*—such warhorses are very much on the boards this season—but the main thrust of the operatic programming ventures into two other areas—non-canonic opera and relatively neglected American works. *The Cunning Little Vixen* (1924), first produced by this house in 1981, revived in 1983 and 1990 and now again this year, brings us to the paradox of Janáček's achievement. Here is a composer who died in 1928 but whose works still offer a challenge to audiences because of their feisty idiosyncrasy in subject matter, roughly hewn orchestral textures, and eccentric vocal speech rhythms (when heard in the original Czech, needless to say). Very much a man of his time, and all the more so the older he got, Janáček was an admirer of Alban Berg and his *Wozzeck*, and was quite won over by the clangorous experimental piano music of Henry Cowell, who passed through Janáček's home town of Brno in 1926. The only odd element in this sketch is the fact that Janáček was born six years before Mahler and Wolf, and ten years before Richard Strauss, all patented post-Romantics.

How did Janáček leap over the generations—or, more specifically, how could so much of the European avant-garde of the Teens and Twenties rub off on a man born so long before, one of Antonin Dvořák's closest friends for thirty years?

Longevity. It is extremely handy to be able to attain one's seventy-fourth year in good health and with a still inquiring spirit; outside of the astonishing career of Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), not many composers have reached the fullness of their years without becoming a bit stale and repetitious. In the last eight years of his life, Janáček completed four major operas, the *Sinfonietta*—his orchestral masterpiece—, the splendid *Glagolitic Mass*, and his two string quartets. It should also be noted that his originality was with him from the very start. In spite of desultory student years in Leipzig and Vienna, he was an autodidact who made use of his busy career as choral conductor, organist, teacher, and theoretician on the periphery of Czech musical life—in Brno, not Prague—to evolve a musical language based on the notated rhythms of

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the Czech language and his persistent exploitation of sounds heard from animals and in nature. If his scores are full of groans, chirps, and howls, it is because he scrupulously recorded those sounds and their quirky, off-balance accentuations. Much of his originality comes from an irrepressible pantheism.

The Cunning Little Vixen—the made-for-Disney translation of *Příhody Lišky Bystroušky* (literally: "The Adventures of the Vixen Sharpears")—doesn't indicate the complexity of the libretto and its magical music. Based on a popular serial novel that Janáček discovered because of his housekeeper's uproarious laughter while reading the work in the kitchen of his home, this is a forest idyll inhabited by a hunter/forester, his friends, and a full complement of singing animals—crickets, mosquitoes, frogs, roosters, a badger, an owl, and a woodpecker, all suited to the fetchingly scary imagination of Maurice Sendak.

The menagerie is united by the story of a vixen in search of a fox, seeking cyclical permanence through regeneration. Animals and men are in symbiotic existence in the tale, with death hovering everywhere. Janáček's strange masterpiece is less an opera for children than an opera of many levels that also attains the innocent wonderment of a child's world, as does *The Magic Flute*. Men do terrible things to animals in this opera, but they also learn from the animals around them, as for example in the ecstatic finale in which the forester throws down his musket in a moment of final illumination.

It is perhaps inevitable that the production is overwhelmed by Sendak's costumes and the gossamer settings, both friendly and menacing. But praise must also be given to the lumbering and crawling of the singer-animals and the two lead singers, Robin Blitch Wiper as Vixen Sharpears, and Richard Paul Fink as Bartos the Forester. Anyone who has heard this work in the original Czech is aware that the language is so embedded into the fabric of the composer's imagination that effective translation is almost impossible. All the more compliments therefore to the translators, Robert T. Jones and Yveta Synek Graff, who have matched Janáček's linguistic singularity with appropriate tones and accents. I will also add that a jury of three children accompanying me gave high marks to the sets and the costumes, even if the music did lose them at times.

The New York City Opera's association with the work of composer Carlisle Floyd (b. 1926) goes back to September 1956, when the company presented his first major opera, *Susannah*. The work was a critical success, earning the then unknown composer a New York Music Critic's Circle Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship. This popular recognition does not mean that he has equal standing in the American musical establishment. As a South Carolinian whose major studies were carried out with the still unrecognized composer-pianist Ernst Bacon, Floyd's creative life has been a struggle for scarce performance opportunities in a musical world whose movers and shakers inevitably prefer a more expansive, if not atonal, musical language than that used by Floyd, whose roots are very much in American folk tradition and nineteenth-century harmonic usage.

Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* is emblematic of the struggle he has been through over the years. Although the City Opera had premiered *Susannah* and two subsequent operas, a promised production in 1968 never materialized, and the premiere was given to Seattle in 1970. It is only now, thirty years later, that the opera has come home to the company that originally projected its first production. What is so admirable in Floyd is his steely determination to stick to what he wants to do in musical theater, even though the subjects might not seem automatically "operatic" at first glance. This is the spare tale of two wandering farmworkers, George and Lennie, who dream of owning a farm and working their own land. Lennie is, in Floyd's words, mentally "stunted," a hulk of

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ROGER KIMBALL'S

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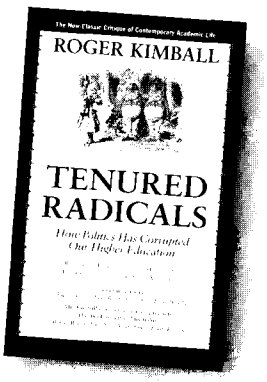

Since *Tenured Radicals* first appeared in 1990, it has achieved a stature as the leading critique of the ways in which the humanities are now taught and studied in American universities. Trenchant and witty, it lays bare the sham of what now passes for serious academic pursuit in too many circles. In this new edition, completely reset, Roger Kimball has brought the text up to date and added a new Introduction. Those who have never read *Tenured Radicals* are in for a treat; others may find a second reading worth their while."Mr. Kimball names his enemies precisely....This book will breed fistfights."—Roger Rosenblatt, *New York Times Book Review.*

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a young man with the physique and strength of a giant. His friend George is the active protagonist of the pair. Both men encounter the nasty son of the boss on a farm, Curley, and his promiscuous wife. Without full knowledge of Lennie's mental state, she vaguely insinuates movements that might be a seduction of Lennie, who responds to her in a robotically childlike way. As this half-playful, half-sinister activity proceeds, we see Lennie on stage and through his music gradually losing control until finally he mindlessly strangles her, seemingly unaware of the power of his hands. As directed by Rhoda Levine, this whole scene from the second act was both frightening and a classic lesson in operatic dramaturgy. After the death of Curley's wife, George realizes that he must shoot his best friend—on humane grounds, as it were—"to save him from being lynched," as Steinbeck's biographer Jay Parini describes the climax of the work.

The composer recognized the difficulties of making such a populist tale of the elemental life into an opera, grand or otherwise. In the critical language very much of another era, Mark Van Doren complained in 1937 about the fact that "all but one of the persons in Mr. Steinbeck's extremely brief novel are subhuman, if the range of the word human is understood to coincide with the range thus far established by fiction." Carlisle Floyd used a musical language expressly limited to the stark realities of the tale. Floyd stated assuredly in 1969 that "you obviously can't sustain an opera for two and a half hours with ranch music." But things change, and in 1998, when audiences respond to the most jarring musical diversity in concert and opera, not to mention on Broadway, I increasingly craved the abrupt intrusion of a good dose of "ranch music" of any variety, no matter how horribly saccharine and twangy, in bad taste or worse—anything that might give color and variety to an opera noble in intent, but bland and dreary in its final effect.

It is difficult to imagine the oafish Lennie sung with more nuance and thrust than by Anthony Dean Griffey. Even though Mr.

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Floyd has made him into a passive character following the limitations in Steinbeck, Mr. Griffey's stage presence and heroic tenor pretty much stole the show. And this was true in spite of the earnest and well-focused contributions of Dean Ely in the role of George and Nancy Allen Lundy as Curley's Wife, who vamped her way through her part with vocal aplomb and seductive wile until her untimely end at the hands of Lennie. The evocative workers' barracks were designed by the imaginative John Conklin, and the chorus of cowboys and ranch hands and the orchestra were skillfully managed by conductor Stewart Robertson.

Concert note

Juana Zayas,
at Seton Hall University, New Jersey

The Cuban-born pianist Juana Zayas was eleven years old when she graduated from the Peyrellade Conservatory in Havana. She studied at the Paris Conservatoire where she took first prize in both piano and chamber music and then took a prize at the Geneva International Music Competition. In 1977, Miss Zayas made her New York debut. A *New York Times* critic praised the recital as "an imposing feat," and later mentioned it as one of the high points in his review of the musical year. Miss Zayas's 1983 recording of the Chopin *Etudes* (reissued by Music & Arts in 1995, CD 891)was almost embarrassingly well received. One reviewer went so far as to declare that Miss Zayas had outperformed Maurizio Pollini.

For most pianists, these achievements would have been the foundation, if not the guarantee, of a successful career. The remarkable thing about Miss Zayas, however, is that she has assembled her reputation in her spare time. For over twenty years, marriage and family took precedence over public performance. Now with her children grown, Miss Zayas has started to appear in public more frequently. Her recital at Seton Hall on November 22, 1998 showed that while Miss Zayas may have been absent from the stage, she has certainly not been absent from the piano, for her performances were striking indeed.

The first half of the program featured Chopin's C-minor Nocturne, op. 48, no. 1 and Sonata in B-flat minor op. 35. Miss Zayas's interpretation of the chameleon-like nocturne put one in mind of Liszt's story about Chopin's gift for mimicry. Chopin put on one of Liszt's suits, donned a wig, and impersonated the younger composer at his apartment so effectively that when a friend of Liszt's stopped by to chat, Chopin/Liszt was convincing enough that the friend promised to return the next day to continue their conversation. Thus it was with Miss Zayas's playing: though we knew the work was Chopin's, her phrasing and intonation was powerfully Lisztian, the "orchestral" central section especially so.

As for the sonata, Miss Zayas's brilliant interpretation made it seem to be Chopin's greatest work. The first movement was a lesson in how this composer should be played: great poise, enchanting rhythm, and a clear articulation of voices all contained in a drivingly emotional interpretation. Aside from its own beauties, the scherzo showed, however inadvertently, the level of Miss Zayas's concentration. Halfway through the movement, a heavyset maintenance man in coveralls, workboots, and a red baseball cap with the word "Pirates" on it noisily walked onto the platform. He stared at the audience, then slowly waved a thermometer over his head. He shook it, grimaced at the result, tapped the wall thermostat, then stared at the pianist and the audience again before leaving. Those still following the (piano) performance would have noted the movement's propulsive quality, its nicely rendered shape, and its beautifully contrasted trills. The *Marche funèbre* was a wonderful contrast between the tragic and the poignant and featured an unusually dramatic stuttering effect starting in the seventh bar. The Bach-like presto, so suggestive of restless, muttering sleep, was played closely and intensely.

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In the second half of the program, Miss Zayas played Debussy and Ravel. The three Debussy études (I, II, and V) from the first book were elegant and atmospheric. The first ("pour les cinq doigts d'après Monsieur Czerny") conveyed a colorful amusement, the second ("pour les Tierces") had a nice tonal gradation with voices emerging out of a cloud of notes before the work's dramatically abrupt end, and the boisterous and pompous fifth ("pour les Octaves") featured its demented cuckoo, with the cruel octave work at the end played fast and cleanly; this was an effective set. The *L'Isle joyeuse* that followed was rushed with the music's luscious tonality getting somewhat lost in the hurry. The interpretation was all the more surprising since Debussy is thought to have written the work in an erotic haze, having just left his first wife and run off to Dieppe with Emma Bardac. Miss Zayas's performance had less languor than skittishness.

Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*, which ended the scheduled program, suffered from no such pacing problem. Miss Zayas used the "three poems of transcendental virtuosity," as Ravel called them, to convey the eeriness of the Aloysius Bertrand poems that inspired them. The laughing, watery *Ondine* was beautifully colored while *Le Gibet* showed an acute rhythmic control that made the left hand bell-notes all the more stark and creepy. *Scarbo* was the high point of the recital from its leaping introduction to the prolonged work in the lower register where Miss Zayas's projection was so intense that the sound seemed to be pressing on the listener from all sides. This piece can easily sound disjointed and jerky, even in the hands of distinguished pianists, but Miss Zayas's vision and musical command allowed the audience to feel the effect of *Scarbo*'s eight-plus minutes of undiluted malevolence before his final evaporation. Four encores followed: three Chopin études and then, to calm things down, the *Soirée de Grenade* from Debussy's *Estampes*. A notable recital and a name to note.

—James F. Penrose

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The media

An era without honor

by James Bowman

On the eve of President Clinton's lawyers' presentation of his defense before the House Judiciary Committee, the indefatigable White House media operation circulated to other media outlets a discovery by *The Los Angeles Times* that the committee's chairman, Henry Hyde, seemed to have a double standard about lying by public men. In a piece titled "Hyde's View On Lying Is Back Haunting Him," the paper noted that, during the Iran-Contra hearings in 1987, Hyde had excused the false testimony of Oliver North by quoting Jefferson: "A strict observance of the written laws is doubtless one of the high duties of a good citizen, but it is not the highest. The laws of necessity, of self-preservation, of saving our country when in danger are of higher obligation. . . . On great occasions, every good officer must be ready to risk himself in going beyond the strict line of law when the public preservation requires it."

Joe Lockhart, Clinton's press secretary, commented: "I think the Chairman shows remarkable dexterity in applying standards when it comes to the subject at hand," and the media took up the cry. "Oliver North and Bill Clinton: are the cases that different?" asked Frank Sesno on CNN. "Have the rules changed? Or is Henry Hyde a hypocrite?" Rather remarkably for CNN, Sesno gave Oliver North himself a chance to answer these questions: "Henry Hyde is commenting on the fact that the Reagan administration was accused of the following things: of not revealing everything that they were doing to save the lives of Americans being tortured to death in dungeons in Beirut, and trying to keep a freedom fighter army alive in Central America that the Congress had sent into combat. Now 1998. Fast-forward eleven years: Henry Hyde is commenting on the fact that the chief executive officer of the United States of America, the President, has raised his right hand, promised to take an oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and then lied after he raised his hand—a major difference."

This is true enough, though rather disingenuous. There is no doubt that North's lies were for a far nobler purpose than Clinton's—and were perhaps even, as Hyde claimed through a spokesman, in the interest of national security. Clinton, by contrast, had no other end in view than saving himself from public embarrassment. At the least, it seems, Clinton's lie was unambiguously wrong, a matter of black and white, while North's had to be judged, as Hyde said back in 1987, "in the murkier grayness of the real world." But there is another way to look at the matter. What makes a lie a lie is not that it is false. There is no blame in deceiving an enemy, or a madman, or an excessively inquisitive neighbor. The fault in lying comes when the falsehood is a breach of faith. A culpable lie is one you tell to someone who has a reasonable expectation that you will tell him the truth.

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If that is the case, North's lie is actually worse than Clinton's. Those who are the recipients of the public trust have a prima facie obligation to tell the public the truth about the matters with which they have been entrusted, but not about their private lives. And, indeed, it has been the argument from privacy which has been the mainstay of the Clinton defense ever since the President himself said, in his grudging confession of August 17, 1998, that "even presidents have private lives." In fact, in just over five-hundred words on that occasion, he used the word "private" seven times—perhaps having been inspired by a piece by the philosopher Thomas Nagel which had run three days before in *The Times Literary Supplement*—a publication which, I should add, employs me as its American editor.

"The distinction between what an individual exposes to public view and what he conceals or exposes only to intimates," Nagel wrote,

> is essential to permit creatures as complex as ourselves to interact without constant social breakdown. Each of our inner lives is such a jungle of thoughts, feelings, fantasies and impulses that civilization would be impossible if we expressed them all, or if we could all read each other's minds. The formation of a civilized adult requires a learned capacity to limit expression to what is acceptable in the relevant public forum, and development of a distinct inner and private life that can be much more uninhibited, under the protection of the public surface. . . Civilization is a delicate structure that allows wildly different and complex individuals to co-operate peacefully and effectively only if not too much strain is put upon it by the introduction of disruptive private material, to which no collective response is necessary or possible. Americans who recognize this fact can only look on in shame at the destructive spectacle now being acted out by a group of childish and powerful figures who have never understood it.

True, all true. But—wouldn't you just know it?—that darned old "murkier grayness of the real world" comes creeping in again to confound our easy analyses.

To begin with, it was Clinton himself who made possible the breaking down of the traditional and reasonable barriers between public and private. As Jeffrey Rosen pointed out in an article in *The New Yorker* of September 28, in the course of lobbying Congress for his Crime Bill of 1994, the President made a deal for the support of Susan Molinari—then a two-term Republican representative from Staten Island and more recently (and even more briefly) a political commentator for CBS—by including in the bill her amendment to change the rules of evidence in cases of sexual assault. Under the new rules, a defendant's past behavior towards women is allowed in evidence against him, and when Paula Jones alleged, belatedly, a sexual assault by the President at the Excelsior Hotel in Little Rock (Defendant had "put his hand on Plaintiff's leg and started sliding it toward the hem of Plaintiff's culottes, apparently attempting to reach Plaintiff's pelvic area"), her lawyers began to interview other women, including Monica Lewinsky.

Thus he was required to answer, under oath, "questions no American citizen would ever want to answer"—as he put it in his speech of August 17. And thus he committed perjury, which resulted in the Starr report which resulted in the impeachment hearings. If ever a man were hoist with his own petard it was Bill Clinton, which made it a particularly good joke that he and his apologists, many of whom had helped him ride into office in "the Year of the Woman" under the feminist banner, now had begun to think that maybe it would have been smarter not to have been messing around with dangerous things like petards in the first place. Maybe the personal was not the political after all. But those who stood with Clinton then were now very ill-placed indeed to start bleating about the sacredness of private life.

For a short time, there was to this presidency, as there was to Richard Nixon's,

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a solemn, almost tragic, symmetry. We can trace a direct line of connection from the Thomas hearings, the public outcry about "sexual harassment," and the legal actions which resulted from it, to Clinton's successful 1992 presidential campaign, cheered on by all those perky new Democratic women senators, the "Troopergate" story in *The American Spectator*, and the resulting lawsuit brought by Paula Jones for sexual harassment. And from the Paula Jones lawsuit there flows directly the Starr inquiry, the evidence under oath about sex with subordinates, the lies and the cover-up, the public humiliation of the President, and, finally, the impeachment hearings. If ever a man brought misfortune down upon his own head, Bill Clinton did.

If the tragedy had happened, as briefly it seemed it might have done, we would have been filled with pity and terror, recognizing that Clinton's tragic mistake, his "hamartia" as Aristotle calls it, was that when he first breached the barrier between public and private he thought he could reveal only as much of his personal life as he chose to. Obviously, we were to see and admire his sympathetic feelings towards the jobless, the oppressed, and the downtrodden; obviously we could bask in the warm glow of the love he shared with Hillary and Chelsea. Occasionally, too, he would demonstrate what a fine and genuine and unstuffy fellow he was by sharing with us, say, the secrets of his preferences in undergarments. He realized what was to be gained by introducing to politics what the fan magazines and supermarket tabloids had long been offering their readers, namely, a bogus intimacy created by selective revelation of the details of private life.

But there are no more tragedies in the era of postmodern politics. Only farce. Long before the impeachment hearings began in November, and long before the President's ingenious lawyers began his counteroffensive before the Judiciary Committee in December, it was clear that Humpty Clinton would not be having any great falls. Or not any time soon. He had been saved by the two salient facts that (a) the media elite hated Clinton for lying to them less than they hated the allegedly "puritanical" Mr Starr for investigating his lies, and (b) the people hated his sexual misbehavior less than it hated the media elite for endlessly reporting it. He was the lesser of two evils in both cases.

And as if that were not luck enough for one man, he didn't even seem to feel properly ashamed at having to answer those "questions no American citizen would ever want to answer." Certainly, the terrible humiliation that anyone else might have felt in the circumstances never seems to have touched him. As he told Trude B. Feldman in an interview last September,

> You know some people say to me, "I feel so terrible for you. It's so awful what has been publicized to the whole country, the whole world." Believe it or not, and I know it's hard for people to believe, that has not bothered me very much because of the opportunity I've had to seek spiritual counseling and advice and to think through this and to try to focus much more on how I can properly atone, how I can be forgiven, and then how I can go back to healing with my family.

One can only reflect wryly on how such a man would react to the punishment proposed by former President Gerald Ford—that he be forced to come to the well of the House of Representatives there to be publicly rebuked by members of Congress for his behavior. "Please don't fling me in dat briar patch!" would about sum it up. He would make himself even more of a hero of the therapeutic culture as the "healing" became even more complete—from whatever it was we were meant to imagine had been the wound in the first place. By rights, Professor Nagel and his fellow advocates of presidential privacy ought to object as strenuously to this mawkish parade of "healing" as they do to the revelation of Clinton's sexual peccadilloes, for both involve dragging into the public

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square matters that any man of taste or judgment would prefer to be left to private life. But their solicitude for the President begins to look as comically misplaced as everything else about the scandal. Once it became—as it was bound to become—a contest of passive-aggressive pugilism, the poor chief executive, "the most maligned and assailed man in the history of the executive office" as Geraldo Rivera comically put it, needed about as much help from some wimpy philosopher as Mike Tyson does. The worst thing about Kenneth Starr was that he appeared to be so self-deluded as to have imagined when he consented to be interviewed by Barbara Walters that he could begin to compete with Clinton in presenting to the nation an affecting picture of personal authenticity.

Still, it is no bad thing to have an occasional reminder, such as Professor Nagel supplies, of what it means to live in an age without honor, at least as the term is traditionally understood. One thing it means is that our public men and women will be judged not by their actions but by their feelings. Thus when Clinton appeared before the entire country and said that "I must take complete responsibility for all my actions, both public and private," no one for a moment supposed that it meant anything other than that he was (or meant for us to think he was) very, very sorry for those actions. In the same way, in 1993 Janet Reno took complete responsibility for the horrible botch she made of the siege of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, but then continued to serve as U.S. Attorney General as if nothing had happened and David Koresh and company were continuing to collect guns and practice polygamy in peace. Instead, they were all dead, and no one in the administration officially suffered so much as an inconvenience in consequence. Being responsible meant the same thing as feeling (or saying you felt) regret.

Another consequence of living without any sense of honor in our public life is that it becomes literally a meaningless statement to say, as *The Washington Times* did, that "an honorable man would not have carried on a sordid sexual relationship in the Oval Office with a woman not his wife—one young enough to be his daughter." Likewise *The Manchester Union Leader*: "Bill Clinton, a moral vacuum and a man utterly devoid of honor, will put the country through more of this fetid seediness . . . for no greater purpose than to save his own sorry skin." Likewise, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*: "Bill Clinton should resign . . . because his repeated, reckless deceits have dishonored his Presidency beyond repair." On "Meet the Press," William Bennett, decrier of the "Death of Outrage," referred to "honor lost" while his liberal Democratic interlocutor, Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, denied that Clinton has "brought shame" on the presidency. "Bill Clinton is not a man of honor," said Bill Kristol, editor of *The Weekly Standard* and commentator for ABC News. "But are there no honorable men around him?"

The answer turned out to be no. Nor around anybody else either. For honor, unlike virtue, is not a definable set of principles, true and eternal in all times and places, but rather what a given society will regard with esteem and what it will not at a given moment. In the Middle Ages, from which we derive our ideas about honor, it was honorable among the small group of those qualified to pronounce on the matter for a man to defeat his enemy in battle, to show mercy when it was requested, to be courteous to women, and true to his word to men—at least when they were fellow members of the honor group. Now that the honor group comprises any not obviously deranged citizen capable of answering a pollster's questionnaire, it is as clear as clear can be that what the President has done is not considered to be a matter of shame or dishonor.

Is this a sign of social decay? Maybe. But it was not a dishonor to President Kennedy either—a fact which may have been not, as people think, just because most people

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didn't know about it then. Maybe they didn't know about it then because it was not a matter of honor. Sex, for men, never really has been, after all. Back in the days when honor had a clear meaning, it meant for women nothing but chastity, though a man might be as unchaste as he liked without any stain on his honor. If the largely male press corps during the presidency of John F. Kennedy therefore thought his sexual adventures not worth reporting, we have good reason now for supposing that neither did their audience think them worth hearing about.

That, to me, is the hopeful side to the public's refusal to punish an appalling hypocrite like Bill Clinton. Is it possible we might even get the dear, dead double standard back? Maybe that would be to hope for too much. But on the same edition of "Meet the Press" where Bill Bennett proclaimed the "Death of Outrage," Patricia Ireland of the National Organization for Women said that, although the President's behavior had been "disgusting" and "repugnant," she agreed with Representative Conyers that there had been no lack of honor on his part. Indeed, she said, she thought that we are "moving toward" a greater sense of political honor and less hypocrisy since, "fifteen years ago, this would not even have been reported or disclosed." Such a topsy-turvy notion of honor suggests—as Clinton often seems to do—that the more you publicly proclaim your faults, the more honorable you are. Funny, then, that she should have missed seeing the historical truism that hypocrisy is often the precondition of honor.

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Books

Matisse: the genius as late bloomer

by Kenneth Wayne

With the second volume of John Richardson's great Picasso biography already out, it was only a matter of time before Matisse (1869–1954) received equal treatment. Hilary Spurling—a London-based theater critic, literary editor, book reviewer, and biographer—has met the challenge admirably with her book, whose fluidity, depth of research, and level of detail are awe-inspiring.[1] While Spurling does not attempt to do the intense pictorial analysis or to make the art historical references that Richardson does—"This book is a biography, not a work of art history," she writes in the preface—she provides an extraordinarily rich and fascinating context for understanding Matisse's art and dispels some of the myths and assumptions about him. Her book reveals the "unknown" Matisse, the man not understood by a study of his paintings alone.

The most remarkable thing that comes across about Matisse's early period is just how undistinguished it was, especially in terms of art. This genius was definitely a late bloomer. His ambitions as a youth were to be a clown or horseman. He was a gifted marksman and violinist. In 1887, Matisse left Bohain in the north of France near the Belgian border, and headed to Paris to study law. He apparently never even set foot in the Louvre during this period. Not until age twenty, while convalescing in a hospital from a hernia (probably caused by carrying heavy grain sacks in his father's seed store), did Matisse dabble with some paints and discover his true calling in life.

Matisse's involvement with the world of art did not come easily. His formal training began in Paris in 1891 with a brief period of study under Bouguereau, the famous academic artist. Matisse failed the entrance examination at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts but managed to enter through the back door; the great Symbolist Gustave Moreau was a new teacher who accepted students regardless of their examination results. Matisse studied for six important years with Moreau, an unconventional teacher who raised suspicion among his colleagues. "[Moreau] planted question marks in our minds," Matisse later recounted. Goya's paintings were also particularly influential: "I believed I would never be able to paint because I didn't paint like the others. Then I saw Goya at Lille. That was when I understood that art could be a language; I thought that I could become a painter." Soon afterwards, the Louvre became his true school. "I was a student of the galleries of the Louvre," he asserted. But, Matisse was still taking art classes at age thirty, at the Académie Julian where he was heckled by the younger students as an out-of-place old timer. Indeed, it appears that few people had high hopes or expectations for Matisse.

1 *The Unknown Matisse A Life of Henri Matisse: The Early Years, 1869–1908*, by Hilary Spurling; Alfred A. Knopf, 528 pages, $28.

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According to Spurling's account, people in his town thought he was an imbecile, a failure who was confirming everyone's worst fears. Matisse himself was plagued by self-doubts and a lack of confidence exacerbated by his father's concerns about his abilities. Matisse did not have visions of grandeur, only hopes of eking out a living. His career as an artist was not truly launched until 1905, when he was thirty-five years old.

Spurling provides heart-wrenching accounts of the grinding, debilitating poverty that Matisse endured for the first fifteen years of his career. His wife Amélie and daughter Marguerite would scrape paint off canvases so that he could reuse them. This is a revelation, for it is at odds with our image of Matisse as a well-dressed and comfortable looking bourgeois gentleman who was headed for a career in law. This information opens Matisse's art up to new interpretations. Rather than seeming like rich, appealing reflections of a privileged life—as in Matisse's legendary quote where art is meant to be "something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue"—his art can now seem to be as escapist as that of his anarchist Neo-Impressionist artist friends Paul Signac, Henri-Edmond Cross, and Maximilien Luce.

Spurling reveals that Matisse's greatest contribution to art—his celebration of color as an expressive force independent of a descriptive function—developed not from his formal training but from his personal life. The artist came from a drab city in the north, characterized by gray skies. His only exposure to color and light came in the rich textiles produced in his region. A turning point in Matisse's art came during his stays on Belle-Ile-en-Mer in Brittany during the summers of 1895–1897. Particularly important to Matisse was an Australian painter, John Peter Russell, who ran an art colony on the island that owed a great deal to the theories of van Gogh, his late friend and former classmate. Matisse credited Russell with introducing him to the Impressionists' theories of light and color, especially to the contributions of Monet. Russell's name comes up frequently in studies of the period, but without much information. Happily, Spurling has uncovered a significant amount of interesting material on this fascinating figure. A color reproduction in the book of one of Russell's paintings shows him to be an artist of great talent and, several years before the founding of the movement by Matisse, a definite Fauvist in his strong use of expressionist color.

Early in 1897, before his third and last summer on Belle-Ile-en-Mer, Matisse met Camille Pissarro. A great friend, teacher and mentor to the Impressionists, he was also, it is interesting to see, an important influence on the young Matisse. Pissarro encouraged the younger artist and introduced him to actual works by the Impressionists, particularly his own and those of Monet. Matisse's interest in light and color intensified after his marriage to Amélie Parayre, a woman of Corsican heritage from southwestern France. Their wedding trip to Corsica in February 1898 forever changed his life because of the bright sun and colors that he discovered there. The art collector Pierre Lévy later said that Matisse told him that Fauvism actually started in Corsica. Matisse credited his wife with introducing him to the south. It was not until the summer—now legendary—he spent at St. Tropez in 1904 with Signac, however, that Matisse finally dedicated himself to the celebration of color.

Indeed, his career was subject to major fits and starts. Just when Matisse seems to have made breakthroughs and started to explore color and light in earnest in Belle-Ile-en-Mer and Corsica, he was knocked off track and fell into his "dark period" (1902–03). He was derailed, Spurling posits, by an international scandal she discovered involving his in-laws, Catherine and Armand Parayre. The tragedy traumatized the close-knit family. The Parayres were confidantes and supporters of Frédéric Humbert, a député, and his wife Thérèse, who perpetrated a major financial scam that im-

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periled the government and banking system and led to many suicides. This drama played out on the front pages of the newspapers. The Parayres were implicated because of their close connection to the perpetrators. In addition to being profoundly embarrassed by their longstanding friendship with the thieves, the Parayres quickly descended from a life of wealth, privilege, and status to being penniless social outcasts. For his part, Matisse went from being respected and admired in his village for having married well to being considered, once again, an embarrassment to his family and neighbors. Although an indirect participant in this event, Matisse suffered greatly; he had health problems and essentially stopped working for two years. The result, one could argue, is that the twentieth-century art revolution did not start on time but had to wait a couple of years.

Spurling also contributes to the discussion about the great rivalry between Matisse and Picasso. Older by twelve years and the first to make a big splash in Paris, Matisse was the one initially being emulated. Spurling suggests that Picasso's curious decision to adopt a thirteen-year-old girl in 1907, when he was still living in an artist's studio at the Bateau Lavoir, could have been influenced by the fact that Matisse had a thirteen-year-old daughter. And cannot Picasso's move away from the color of the Blue and Rose periods towards the somber canvases of analytic Cubism be read as a reaction against Matisse the great colorist? Picasso may not have wanted to be seen as one of Matisse's many followers. For Picasso, art was definitely not meant to be like a good armchair. The Picasso-Matisse rivalry is a subject of endless fascination, and will be explored in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 2002 in which other tidbits will likely emerge.

The book provides a rich array of new information that allows us to understand the making of this great artist: for example, regional politics in the nineteenth century, art training in the French provinces, and details about Matisse's friends and mentors who have faded into oblivion. They share equal attention with the already-known supporters of his art, including the American collectors Michael, Sarah, Leo, and Gertrude Stein and the Russian Sergei Schoukine. Although no mention is made of future volumes in the preface or on the dust jacket, this book is in fact the first of a multi-volume biography. One can only wait with great anticipation for the next volume and for Spurling's discussion of Matisse's involvement in the heady "Banquet Years" of Paris immediately before the Great War.

Honor & duty

Tom Wolfe A Man in Full.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux,
742 pages, $28.95

reviewed by James Bowman

There is probably nothing to be done anymore about what is to me the regrettable fact that American culture is obsessed by race. One may weary of the apparently inexhaustible fascination of the British with class, but at least class is an inherently interesting subject. Race is not—unless of course you are one of the crackpot theorists of white or black racial supremacy. The subject holds an artificial but apparently boundless interest, however, from its centrality to American social history, and this interest is self-reinforcing. Race is important to us and will doubtless always be important to us because it has always *been* important to us. That importance makes it virtually unignorable for a novelist like Tom Wolfe who aspires to a "realistic" style. But for Wolfe race is only a means—and one of many means at that—to an end whose significance is more permanent.

As does *Bonfire of the Vanities*, Mr Wolfe's new novel revives one of this century's archetypal racial confrontations—this time the rape (or alleged rape) of a white woman by a black man. From *Native Son* to *To Kill a Mockingbird* we learned to have but one ex-

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pectation of such a *mise en scène*: a tragedy born of apparently ineradicable hatred and fear. But when the daughter of Inman Armholster, a tycoon in the new, go-ahead, progressive Atlanta, "the city too busy to hate," claims that she has been raped by Fareek "the Cannon" Fanon, star running back of the victorious Georgia Tech football team, the result is a comic mélange of politics, corruption, and money in which both race and sex (as the term is popularly understood) are not much more than trace ingredients.

But sex in another sense is central to the novel, for running parallel with the story of a possible rape is the story of a possible bankruptcy, which is seen both by its victim, another Atlanta tycoon called Charlie Croker, and Tom Wolfe as a symbolic emasculation. Charlie is the "man in full" of the title. A former football hero himself, and a veteran of Vietnam, he is a massive man called Cap'm Charlie by the (mainly black) retainers at "Turpmtine," his 29,000-acre plantation in South Georgia, now mainly valuable not for its pine resin but for its thoroughbred Tennessee walking horses and its quail shooting. But Charlie has overreached himself. He has built a forty-story office building in what he hopes will become an "edge city" of Atlanta, but which he cannot rent. As a result, he owes PlannersBanc over half-a-billion dollars and is threatened with the loss not only of Croker Concourse and Croker Worldwide Foods but also of Turpmtine, his house in Buckhead, his private jets, and everything else he owns.

The excellence of Mr Wolfe's novel is displayed in several expertly managed dramatic episodes designed to show off Charlie's brute masculinity—on a quail shoot, or picking up a rattlesnake with his bare hands, or entertaining a house full of guests with the gross physicality of the copulation of one of his mares and a stallion—and the reaction to it of those around him. Most notably, we focus on the barely suppressed dislike and envy of the sissy salarymen of PlannersBanc who delight in putting Charlie through a "workout session" designed more to humiliate him than to recover his plainly inadequate assets. Equally impressive is the author's telling of the story of Conrad Hensley, an employee of Croker Global Foods in Oakland, California, who is laid off as a result of Charlie's belt-tightening and subsequently experiences an almost-incredible series of adventures that take him by way of prison in Alameda County, California, to Atlanta and a seemingly fated encounter with his former employer.

If this seems like a lot to be going on here, that's because it is. But it is by no means all that is going on. We must also pay attention to a young black lawyer called Roger Too White (actually Roger White II, but renamed by some of his classmates at Morehouse), called upon to defend Fareek Fanon on the rape charge—if one is filed, as it is by no means certain it will be—and Wesley Dobbs Jordan, Roger's classmate at Morehouse and now mayor of Atlanta, who sees a way to exploit the crisis for political gain. In addition there is Jordan's challenger, a black demagogue called André Fleet who secretly receives money from Inman Armholster; one of the PlannersBanc sissies called Raymond Peepgass who is the victim of a ruinous paternity suit and seeks an illegal profit from Charlie's bankruptcy; Charlie's ex-wife, Martha, whom Peepgass romances; and his new, much younger wife, Serena, with whom he finds he has nothing in common. And this is to say nothing of Charlie's sixteen-year-old son, a lost soul called Wally; or of Conrad's wife, two children, and prison acquaintances; or of various other minor characters clamoring for our attention.

The fertility of Tom Wolfe's invention in creating so many interesting characters and so many interesting situations to put them in far outstrips his sense of fictional architecture and leaves him with an annoying number of loose ends only vaguely and inadequately tied up in a final "Epilogue." This is a 742-page book which one comes

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away from wishing it were twice as long. Even thematically, we feel he has scarcely begun to do justice to such socially prominent "issues"—raised presumably for the reason that they *are* socially prominent—as date rape, trophy wives, urban racial politics, the black middle class, the criminal justice system, college athletics, patterns of urban and regional development, immigration, the social function of art, and rap music among many others. Thoughts on all of these matters and manners, some of them remarkable for their shrewdness or wisdom, are translated into dramatic form and swirl around the central episodes involving Charlie and Conrad, but they often do more to obscure the focus of those episodes than to complement them.

Moreover, I am one of those who finds Wolfe's trademark stylistic tics—the liberal use of ellipses, the incessant mockery of his characters' accents, the tortured combinations of vowels and consonants meant to represent ambient noise—more annoying than charming. And I am suspicious of his penchant for self-conscious phrasemaking—here, for example, we have colorful neckwear described as a "pizza-grenade tie" or an upper-class hairstyle as a "Palm Beach crash helmet"—as if he were writing in order to be included in future dictionaries of quotations. There is also something just slightly inauthentic and literary-sounding in some of his pastiche of black ghetto-talk, especially in mock rap numbers:

> Gon' put my jimbo
> Up yo' shanks akimbo!
> Without no shuckin' words,
> No mind-suckin' words!
> You get my meanin'?
> Or you want a skull cleanin'?

"Up yo' shanks akimbo"? I don't think so. Like Conrad's adviser in the ways of prison life, Wolfe tends to give too much emphasis to the injunction to "use da mouth"—that is, to talk in the ghetto-gang patois, which is also the prison patois—as a means of staking out one's territory.

But all such cavils pale into comparative insignificance next to what the novel does triumphantly right. This is, rather astonishingly, to put the circus of business and civic life in late twentieth-century America into a moral context which does not sound foreign or artificial in spite of its provenance in ancient Rome. For Conrad in prison becomes a Stoic, inspired by a book sent to him in error but soon taken up as the only way he finds to make sense of what has happened and will continue to happen to him.

> What little bit Conrad had learned about philosophy at Mount Diablo [Community College] had seemed to concern people who were free and whose main problem was to choose from among life's infinite possibilities. Only Epictetus began with the assumption that life is hard, brutal, punishing, narrow, and confining, a deadly business, and that fairness and unfairness are beside the point. Only Epictetus, so far as Conrad knew, was a philosopher who had been stripped of everything, imprisoned, tortured, enslaved, threatened with death. And only Epictetus had looked his tormenters in the eye and said, "You do what you have to do, and I will do what I have to do, which is live and die like a man." And he had prevailed.

Quite unexpectedly, for us as much as for Conrad and Charlie, what it means to "live and die like a man" proves a question whose vitality is unaffected by decades of unisex morality.

Tom Wolfe's speciality, in both his fiction and his nonfiction, has always been his ability to cut through fashionable cant—however fondly he reproduces it in the course of doing so—in order to get at the permanent and human drama which such cant is generally intended to obscure. In *A Man in Full*, the drama is an almost Racinean one of honor and duty, but translated for the benefit of our trivial times from tragic into comic terms. When Charlie is given a miraculous way out of his financial

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troubles in exchange for betraying a friend, he gloomily reflects that "I can salvage my honor—and lose everything I have." But "why kid myself? This is Atlanta—where your 'honor' *is* the things you possess. Who's going to come visit a man who has salvaged his honor but lost his house on Blackland road? Nobody."

This is true enough so far as it goes, but not entirely true. Or at least Charlie behaves as if it were not entirely true, as if there were people whose opinion of him depended not on what he had but on what he did—and as if it were at least imaginable that their opinion might be supposed to matter more than anyone else's. I think it more a strength than a weakness in the novel that we are never quite sure who these people are. Maybe there aren't any actually living in Atlanta. Maybe the honorable man has no other audience for his actions than the comically anachronistic "Zeus," to whose worship Conrad dedicates himself in the absence of any other gods worthy of his devotion. And yet we cannot ignore in reading it, any more than Tom Wolfe could ignore in writing it, that this book was intended to be—and is—a best-seller. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding at a time when we have every reason to believe that "it's the economy, stupid," there must be a lot of people in whom Charlie's valedictory reflections on material wealth at least strike a distantly reverberant chord:

> How vain and petty it all was, all this exulting over . . . things! One day—soon enough!—we'll all be gone, and there'll be people rooting through all this . . . stuff . . . like maggots. . . . What are antiques, after all, but objects other maggots went over before you? And what is this whole house . . . in the sacred Buckhead . . . but a place he was renting until the next group of renters, as desperate to live in Buckhead as he was, took over. . . . Merely renting! Of course, we think we've bought these things, we think we own them. What a marvelous piece of self-deception! . . . You're only occupying the space until your mortal hide becomes hopelessly decrepit. Your children aren't going to keep the marvelous old place going. . . . They won't waste two tears thinking about the old manse with all its . . . things . . . except to get their hands on the money that flows from all the new maggots rooting through the remains. . . .

Wolfe tailors this melancholy thought to our times by denying Charlie a grand death-bed exit and instead making him an itinerant evangelist of the Zeussian faith pioneered by Conrad—for religion like race can hardly be written of any more without irony. But it is perhaps as much as a contemporary novelist can do to suggest that, beneath the irony and the sardonic humor and the proliferation of "issues" that fill our lives like possessions, more permanent things are at stake.

An unlikely prophet

Gillian Gill, Mary Baker Eddy. Perseus Books, 752 pages, $35

reviewed by Marc M. Arkin

What is it about Mary Baker Eddy? Beginning with the 1909 muckraking biography by Georgine Milmine, writers have been unable to resist the temptation to dish the dirt on the founder of Christian Science. Milmine was followed in quick succession by Wilbur (pro), Dakin (con), Powell (judiciously favorable), Bates and Dittemore (disillusioned), Kennedy (countering Bates and Dittemore), and Smaus (worshipful). Lately, the page tally has been mounting at an ominous rate. First, there was the "definitive" three-volume life published between 1966 and 1971 by Christian Scientist Robert Peel—weighing in with about a thousand pages of text supported by 250 pages of notes. Then, just four years ago, Robert David Thomas entered the lists with a 363-page psychosocial portrait of Mrs. Eddy, justified by what was then called

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"unprecedented access" to the Church's extensive archival holdings. But now Mrs. Eddy has been subjected to the ultimate indignity: Gillian Gill's *Mary Baker Eddy*, a 752-page self-declared postmodern feminist biography bearing claims of "unparalleled access" to the same archives.

You know what you're in for when, in the "Research Note," Ms. Gill breathlessly announces her conversion to the use of primary sources. Overwhelmed by this newfound devotion to the ordinary canons of historical research, she proclaims, "I was by this time panting with desire to sink my teeth into the documentary riches" of the Mother Church. In books about Mrs. Eddy, it pays to read the notes. In this case you would also learn that Ms. Gill was forced to engage in protracted—and expensive—legal maneuvering in order to publish excerpts from many of the documents in the Church archives, that she suspects that much of the material within Church control remains censored, and that she voluntarily had her work fact-checked by a researcher from the Church's history department.

This is not to say that Mrs. Eddy is not ripe for a feminist study. First of all, as Ms. Gill repeatedly tells us, Christian Science has always drawn disproportionate numbers of women, originally through its promise of safe and painless childbirth. Moreover, as a woman who made her own way in life, Mrs. Eddy brought women into the leadership of Christian Science, a radical step during the Gilded Age. Perhaps most provocatively, Mrs. Eddy's theology not only considered the material world to be an illusion but also held out the prospect of a gender-free world presided over by a gender-neutral deity—"God as Father-Mother."

It is also true that Mrs. Eddy has fared badly at the hands of the male establishment. While alive, she was dogged by charges of plagiarism and, in later years, mental incompetence. She has been attacked by writers as diverse as Mark Twain (whose 1908 book *Christian Science* might well have been titled "The Literary Crimes of Mary Baker Eddy") and Harold Bloom (who, in his distinctly idiosyncratic history of American religion, dismissed her as a "monumental hysteric of classical dimensions"). One reason for this skepticism is the sheer improbability of Mrs. Eddy's claims. After all, if the age of revelation was to be reopened after almost eighteen-hundred years and the New Testament's hidden message of healing revealed, the deity might well have chosen a likelier prophet than a penniless divorcée from rural New Hampshire with a fondness for knick-knacks, a weakness for sentimental prose, and a Yankee's proverbial eye for the bottom line.

It is a staple of biographical lore that nothing in Mrs. Eddy's early life presaged her remarkable future. Mary Morse Baker Glover Patterson Eddy—to give Mrs. Eddy her full due—was born in 1821 on a farm in Bow, New Hampshire, the youngest of six. She grew up in relatively comfortable circumstances, was deeply and conventionally religious, and received the rudimentary education common for girls in those days. At twenty-two, she married; within a year Mary Baker Glover was a destitute and pregnant widow. Forced to return to the parental roof and the life of a dependent relation, her childhood pattern of ill-health reasserted itself, especially after the birth of her son, George. As a result, the child was raised by a family retainer.

After drifting for a decade, in 1853 Mary Glover suddenly married Daniel Patterson, an itinerant dentist. The union was a disaster, plagued by poverty, frequent moves, and Patterson's philandering. For her part, Mary Patterson retreated further into invalidism, claiming "spinal inflammation and its train of sufferings—gastric and bilious."

In 1862, barely able to walk, Mrs. Patterson sought out Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, a former clockmaker whose reputation as a mental healer had spread throughout New England's eccentric world of alternative medicine. Almost immediately after her first treatment, Mrs. Patterson found herself restored to health. She took Quimby as her mentor, issued testimonials to his abilities,

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lectured about his theories, and tried her own hand at mental healing.

Then, in mid-January 1866, with her personal life nearing its nadir, Mrs. Patterson received news of Quimby's death. Two weeks later, on February 1, 1866, she slipped and fell on an icy street in Lynn, Massachusetts. In its brief account of the event, the local newspaper reported that she was carried "in an insensible condition" to a nearby house where a doctor found her injuries to be "of a very serious nature." The next day, still "in a very critical condition," friends carried her home.

There, Mrs. Patterson later related, "on the third day," after reading the New Testament, she arose from her bed, having healed herself. Six months later, newly separated from her husband, Mary Patterson was furiously working on a new interpretation of scripture while developing her "science of health." She spent the next decade moving from one threadbare roominghouse to another, ceaselessly formulating and reformulating her revelation. When she emerged in 1875, it was to publish the first edition of *Science and Health* and, a year later, to found the Christian Science Association.

In 1875, when she finally settled in her own home in Lynn, Mary Glover (as she was known after her 1873 divorce) had an institutional mission. Her failed partnership with Richard Kennedy—he practiced as a healer while she taught her theories—further focused her already formidable energies. In 1877, she married Asa Gilbert Eddy, a devoted follower. By 1879, the Church of Christ (Scientist) was formally chartered, followed in 1881 by the Massachusetts Metaphysical College, where Mrs. Eddy taught classes in healing.

Almost immediately, however, defections and lawsuits disrupted Christian Science, a continuing pattern during Mrs. Eddy's life. Gathering a loyal remnant, the sixty-year old Mrs. Eddy transferred her operation to Boston. Shortly afterward, Gilbert Eddy died, a somewhat awkward event given his wife's calling. Mrs. Eddy was undeterred; Gilbert Eddy had died from the effect of negative mesmeric forces—later Christian Scientists called it malicious animal magnetism or "MAM"—directed at him by the movement's enemies. Conventional physicians named the cause of death as heart failure.

Despite these reverses, the movement prospered under Mrs. Eddy's charismatic hand. In 1882, Christian Science was a single fifty-member congregation; eight years later, it was an empire of twenty churches, ninety societies, at least 250 practicing healers, thirty-three teaching centers, and a monthly journal with a circulation of ten thousand. By the late 1880s, however, unfavorable publicity and dissension among her followers—as well as fear of malicious animal magnetism—led Mrs. Eddy to seclude herself. In 1892, she settled at Pleasant View, an estate near her childhood home of Bow, although she moved to a Boston suburb two years before she died. During these nineteen years, Mrs. Eddy visited Boston—the center of Christian Science—only four times, not even attending the 1895 dedication of the Mother Church.

From the ordered retreat of Pleasant View, Mrs. Eddy reorganized her church, centralizing ecclesiastical power—even today, no writing about Christian Science, including this one, goes unnoted by the Church's committee on publications—and curbing the independence of branch churches and practitioners. All the while, faithful adherents stood watch night and day to deflect malicious animal magnetism—now blamed for everything from lost manuscripts and Mrs. Eddy's nightmares to unsettled weather. Her final trial came when her son, initially bankrolled by the Pulitzer organization, brought an unsuccessful suit to have her declared incompetent and obtain control of her personal fortune, estimated at two million dollars. In 1910, Mrs. Eddy finally succumbed to the error of pneumonia at the age of eighty-nine, apparently still in full possession of her faculties.

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What Ms. Gill has produced from these striking materials is less a feminist interpretation—she seems to think that blindly defending Mrs. Eddy against all comers constitutes feminism—than a "woman's book" along the lines of what used to be called a "woman's movie." With a "just us girls" tone, Ms. Gill takes the reader through courtships hitherto unchronicled, household rituals previously undiscussed, and the entire sorry course of Mrs. Eddy's relationship with her illiterate and feckless son. She chattily sympathizes with Mrs. Patterson's trials in securing household help: "as a rather reluctant housekeeper myself, I wonder whether it is better, in practical terms, to have a blind maid or none." When she reads of "the exact place each pin has to occupy on Mrs. Eddy's pincushion," Ms. Gill's "heart fills with gloom." Mary Glover's failure to bond with her infant son is explained: "When the mother is inexperienced, sick, weary, and sad, as Mary Baker Glover was, the sound of the baby's inconsolable howling can induce a guilt and despair that is hard to understand if you have not felt it."

In fact, in good postmodern fashion, the book is as much—if not more—about Ms. Gill than it is about Mrs. Eddy. Through its gushing asides, we learn that Ms. Gill was a widow herself, that she is now happily remarried, that she is the "chief" English translator of the French feminist Luce Irigaray, that she was raised in Wales. With her constant interjection of self—the book is studded with the phrases "in my view," "in my opinion," "it seems probable to me," "I like to imagine," "I surmise"—Ms. Gill is never far from the reader's shoulder. Over and over, she projects her own thoughts into the minds of her subjects and describes the past as she presumes it must have been, as in "I would surmise that perhaps the one critical piece of information she [Mrs. Eddy] gave to students in the obstetrics courses . . . was that at the first sign of any significant problem they should go immediately for the doctor." Personally, I would surmise that this suggestion would come as a surprise to Mrs. Eddy.

Ms. Gill's identification with her subject is almost palpable and certainly painful. Indeed, Ms. Gill is so fiercely partisan that she cannot resist the cheap shot, treating the critics of Christian Science exactly as she accuses them of treating Mrs. Eddy. Without any evidence, Gill guesses first that Richard Kennedy was bisexual and, second, that Mrs. Eddy broke off with him because she discovered his homosexuality. As for Mark Twain—whom Gill discounts as "not an intellectual and not well read"—his reading of *Science and Health* is driven by "patriarchal insecurities." (A particularly rich postmodern moment is provided by Ms. Gill's imagined meeting between Twain and Mrs. Eddy, in which, naturally, Mrs. Eddy stoops to conquer.) Another opponent fares less well; when criticizing Mrs. Eddy, his "male hormones are speaking, not his brain." Harold Bloom and Martin Gardner declared "unreadable a text, which, I suspect, they had not in fact read, though Bloom may have put one of his research assistants on the job." As to Joseph Pulitzer, afflicted by "a strange condition" that made "noise, unexpected physical shocks, and the company of any but handpicked associates increasingly intolerable," he exercised "tyrannical control" from distant retreats through his "highly paid but never wholly trusted subordinates." The primary difference between this and the usual line about Mrs. Eddy is that no one ever accused her of overpaying the help.

On matters theological—and, lest we forget, Mrs. Eddy laid certain claims in this direction—Gill has what can best be described as a tin ear. In one notable passage she compares a translation of St. Augustine's *City of God* to Mrs. Eddy's *Science and Health* and finds them barely distinguishable as to content and prose style. Mrs. Eddy, Ms. Gill opines, has gotten a bad press because, unlike St. Augustine, she was a woman. Although "unquestionably nonlinear," the first edition of *Science and Health* failed "because of the ig-

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norance and stupidity of its public, not of its author." On matters legal, which occupied a large part of Mrs. Eddy's attention, Ms. Gill seems rather less sophisticated than her subject. Discussing nineteenth-century lawsuits, for example, she repeatedly treats a "libel" as a charge of defamation; a "libel" was actually the document that began a lawsuit, what the twentieth century calls a "complaint."

Yet, Ms. Gill's devotion to Mrs. Eddy and to ferreting out the primary sources has yielded some interesting new material. Amid the suffocating detail, the indistinguishable minor characters, and the interminable chatter, the reader hears the voice of a different Mary Baker Eddy, a sharp-witted, competent woman of business, with a salty tongue and a dry sense of humor; no saint, but no charlatan either. Perhaps it takes a postmodern feminist to make Mrs. Eddy look good by comparison.

A hero for the truth

Richard Stone, editor The Unbought Spirit: A John Jay Chapman Reader. University of Illinois Press, 211 pages, $17.95

reviewed by Gerald J. Russello

On rare occasions, the crust of mediocrity covering our literary tradition cracks and allows a glimpse of its unappreciated foundations. This is surely the case with the brilliant polemicist, critic, and playwright John Jay Chapman (1862–1933), whose reputation, despite praise from Henry James, Edmund Wilson, and others, lies half-hidden, emerging from obscurity roughly once each generation. Chapman was the author of works on Dante, Shakespeare, Plato, and Emerson; wrote sharp portraits of his contemporaries; and was a translator of Greek of some distinction. However, he is not to the taste of the trendy theorists and "world lit" advocates who currently inhabit college literature departments.

The publication of this new collection from the University of Illinois Press is a welcome event; indeed, it is the only work of Chapman's writings currently available. It is another sign of the distance between what passes for a literary establishment and its traditions that Chapman—a Harvard-educated scion of the East Coast aristocracy who lived in the WASP enclaves along the Hudson—had to wait for a midwestern press to publish a new edition of his work.

As Jacques Barzun notes in the foreword, Chapman wrote about matters of importance to a democracy: public and personal corruption, the preservation of learning in an atmosphere of consumerism, and the abiding principles of individual conduct. Penance and redemption hold a central, dominating place in his work, and he was not a man to take injustice lightly. In a famous story, Chapman, grieving after beating a man whom he had wrongly thought had insulted his future wife, thrust his own hand into a fire until it was burned beyond repair. He was to turn that passion and concern for justice to the subjects of his writing, from great authors to the city machine bosses.

Interest in Chapman has come in three broad stages. The first was spurred by the publication of M. A. DeWolfe Howe's *John Jay Chapman and His Letters* (1937), still the definitive biography, and Edmund Wilson's *Triple Thinkers* (1938), which praised Chapman as one of the great American critics and possibly its greatest letter writer. In the 1950s and 1960s, Richard Hovey and Melvin Bernstein each published a full-length study. In 1957, Jacques Barzun, in the first posthumous collection, placed Chapman in the company of Jefferson, Cooper, Henry Adams, and Mencken as a profound critic of the national character. Barzun wrote that Chapman expressed a deep understanding of the American practice of democracy in a sinewy, concentrated style that enraptured, delighted, and infuriated at the same time.

The relationship between Chapman's writings and his family history received more attention at midcentury. Chapman's

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grandmother was an ardent abolitionist and colleague of William Lloyd Garrison. Her grandson inherited her crusading spirit, but substituted the influence of money in politics for slavery. As a young man, Chapman was deeply involved in the New York City reform movement against Tammany Hall. This involvement led to an alliance (and, ultimately, a falling out) with Theodore Roosevelt, whom, Chapman felt, had deserted the reformers to please the machine in his run for mayor of New York. The critical results of those years were two profound critiques of American political life, *Causes and Consequences* (1898) and *Practical Agitation* (1900), and a short-lived political broadside "The Political Nursery." Using his keen powers of observation and his experiences, Chapman outlined the moral costs of easy corruption, a lesson that bears repetition in this age of soft money and "lapses in judgment."

The most recent reprise has focused on education. In 1992, the classics journal *Arion*, in a tribute to its late editor, and Chapman admirer, William Arrowsmith, devoted an issue to Chapman's essays on and translations of the classics. Chapman was a vocal opponent of the "professionalization" of scholarship and the sycophancy he saw in the adoption by American institutions of the German-inspired doctoral degree and increasing obsession with pedantic minutiae at the expense of actual literature. In his *Lucian, Plato and Greek Morals* (1931), Chapman complained that "the Nineteenth Century has left a hedge of [critical literature] around every writer of antiquity. . . . A scholar reads the books of other scholars, lest he shall say something that shows ignorance. He dare not miss a trick; just as the social climber dare not miss a party. . . . Must the novice read those forty pages of Williamovitz-Mollendorf which cover each dialogue of Plato like the grease on a Strasbourg pâté? Accurate scholarship, when it prevails, is the epilogue to literature." (One wonders what he would have thought of the more recent wholesale adoption of French literary theory.)

In a typical passage, Chapman praises Emerson as a welcome voice in a nation constricted by the issue of slavery, but faults the New Englander's lack of passion and a curious detachment from emotion. An alien visitor, he wrote, would learn more from an opera than from Emerson: "He would learn from the Italian opera that there were two sexes; and this, after all, is probably the fact with which the education of such a stranger ought to begin."

Almost the only complaint against *The Unbought Spirit* is that it is too short. Chapman's essays on Emerson and Browning are included but not those on Shakespeare and Balzac. There are two chapters excerpted from his political books, as well as his essay "The Doctrine of Non-Resistance," which is an extended exegesis on the political consequences of the Biblical injunction "Resist not evil; but overcome evil with good." His magnificent address "Coatesville," which was given on the anniversary of the torture and death of a black man at the hands of a mob in the Pennsylvania town where it has occurred, is here. (In a curious coincidence, Albert Jay Nock, another almost forgotten American critic with whom Chapman shared the Jay ancestry—although they do not seem to have met—also wrote an essay about the events in Coatesville.) Of Chapman's classical writings, only "Greek as Pleasure" makes the cut, but Stone does provide a few of the better literary portraits (including that of Chapman's friend William James, who is described as enjoying the "immunity of remaining triumphant even though he had been vanquished"), and excerpts from his letters. His translations, plays for children, and the story of Benedict Arnold that Chapman cast as a Greek tragedy must await another volume. Not all of the selections are flattering—Chapman's complaints in a letter to his wife about the "vulgar people" accompanying him on a train reflect a residual snobbishness—but all demonstrate a fertile mind seeking the root of literature, politics, and education.

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Arrowsmith once said of Chapman that he had a "vocation for heroism." Not the heroism of contemporary Hollywood or New York—loudly proclaiming opposition to land mines from the safe perch of a public television benefit—but the heroism that risks reputation, ideals (even, in Chapman's case, physical safety and sanity) for truth.

Hasty reflections

Thomas Beller, editor
Personals.
Houghton Mifflin, 284 pages, $13

reviewed by Paula Friedman

The proliferation of memoirs in recent years may say something about our culture's shifting attitudes toward the personal, but, if so, the message is a contradictory one. In our post-1960s style of open-mindedness, we tend to dig into the most private corners of our own and others' lives as we simultaneously shrink back with squeamishness at much of what we find. Take, for example, Thomas Beller's manner of regarding the twenty memoirs, including one of his own, collected in his anthology, *Personals*. The complete title of the anthology is *Personals: dreams and nightmares from the lives of 20 young writers*. Yet in Beller's preface, he consistently refers to the memoir genre as the "personal essay," a more dignified and certainly less sensationalist locution than his title evokes. Beller's indecisiveness about how to view his material reflects something of our shared discomfort with how to regard the intimate details of a life.

With one or two exceptions, the memoirs in Beller's collection are not particularly sensational. Most of the twenty-something authors—fiction writers and poets—either live in New York or have spent a significant amount of time there. Between the chic bars of the East Village and their three- or four-story walk-ups, the singles life that they recount comes to feel drearily familiar. One of the stronger pieces in the collection makes a geographic departure. The writer Quang Bao fled Vietnam with his family at the age of six and was raised in Sugarland, Texas, where he went about the disorienting business of fitting into a foreign culture. His memoir, "Fortune Trails," centers on accompanying his mother when he was sixteen to visit a fortuneteller in order to seek advice on the family's business.

Unlike some of these memoirists, Bao does not strain to garner epiphanies from his experiences, nor does he rely on tragedy to create pathos. His understated approach allows his insights to stand out in greater relief. Ultimately, Bao's sense of the comic and his leisurely, almost whimsical pacing result in a quiet meditation on the course of his childhood. His eye for character and anecdote is displayed in these two well-packed sentences: "My mother's superstitions depended on her mood. To the horror of her two sisters, she once bought a bouquet of an even number of white flowers, which to most Asians symbolizes death, and arranged them in a vase in the middle of the dining room table for her wedding anniversary, an event she did not want to celebrate that year."

At its best, a memoir can exhibit many of the qualities of good fiction, especially climactic development and narrative energy. Seemingly the most direct of literary forms, the memoir may nevertheless create its own built-in suspense concerning the way things will turn out and who does what to whom and why. No easy task, as this becomes a matter of thoughtfully re-imagining experience, and then conveying these re-imaginings in correspondingly well-crafted language.

Certainly the form has been drawing practitioners, with countless memoirs inundating the publishing world in recent years, taking child and drug abuse, the dysfunctional family, and crippling illnesses as subjects. The range in quality has been vast. Many are thin and unsatisfying. Their authors seem drawn to personal exploration without granting the requisite attention to

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the artistry involved in producing such writings. Short on wisdom and skill, many young memoirists rely on flamboyant content or tone to carry their projects along.

Looking at "12th, Between A and B," the opening memoir in *Personals*, we catch a glimpse of the effects of writing about a too-hastily-reflected-on personal experience. Strawberry Saroyan approaches her struggle to lose her virginity with a mixture of glib seriousness and comedy. Given her invitation to so private a viewing, we hope for more insight, or more engaging art, than she finally gives us. Saroyan begins with the boldly wry comment that "It's hard to say when my virginity became something that I wanted to lose." From here we might expect a comic inquiry, probably detailed with anecdote and reflection, about Saroyan's difficulties. What she provides is a somewhat rambling overview of her life between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, skirting any deeper contemplation. Does her difficulty with sex have to do with her relationship with her father? Saroyan mentions this possibility, but quickly glosses over it before anything much is arrived at. Does it have to do with her residing in Manhattan, a city "that moves at the speed of panic," encouraging, as she describes them, many empty attractions? Saroyan and her dates all seem to speak "the language of fantasy," yet somehow never have sufficient imagination to make the love act a satisfying reality.

In the end, she leaves New York and at a party in the Hollywood Hills has her first sexual encounter with a married man, a relationship that only briefly endures. During their last evening together, Saroyan is struck by a sadness over the limits, the finally less-than-fulfilling quality, of this first important liaison. Her wistful sorrow invites our sympathy, yet because her treatment of her lover's married status is so casually matter-of-fact, we can't help but find ourselves perplexedly asking of Saroyan: What did you expect?

In too many of the *Personals* memoirs we are left wondering what the authors really want to convey. In "3cc cp," Scott Heim writes about his desire for excitement growing up in Kansas. So bored was Heim, and so inherently drawn to the extreme, that he became transfixed by the real-life account of the Kansas rapist and murderer Bob Berdella. One of Berdella's victims escaped to tell his tale, an event that stirred Heim's longing for a similar experience. Becoming a prostitute in his search for high-risk adventure, Heim fortunately quit the trade after his first violent encounter. His tale, though admittedly disturbing, causes us to feel more sadly confused than anything else. Can the relentlessly flat plains of Kansas alone cause such despondent behavior? Surely something is missing from the story.

It is probably no coincidence that some of the most successful pieces have set fairly confined, modest aims for themselves, and treat less intrinsically charged material: Heather Chase's "Motion Sickness," Barton Biggs's "The Heat," and Jennifer Farber's "Window Shopping for a Life." Within similar constraints, Bliss Broyard manages in the both playful and somber "My Father's Daughter" to explore her relationship with her father. Broyard's deft use of indirection as she explores the nature of their bond—both what it meant while he was living and what it means since his death—allows her to look at this familiar experience with a fresh eye. Drawn to a "particular type of older man," Broyard reveals that she seeks out the companionship of men who were also close to her own father, men who had known him well throughout much of his life and hers. But romantic interludes, refreshingly, are not what Broyard is after. Rather, she seeks in these men both paternal companionship and a more specific form of mirroring. Through long conversations and time spent with these men, Broyard attempts to see herself in their eyes, thereby continuing to receive affirmation, a reflected image of herself, as her father's daughter.

What is striking about this piece is Broyard's almost casual imparting of insight

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into her own behavior and the meaning it has for her. Avoiding both melodrama and cliché, she nevertheless manages a fine elegiac tone at key moments. During her closing reflections, Broyard remembers her father's raucous style of learning "the new music" and all "the new dances" from her, a memory that affirms his enduring presence: "I can still hear his encouragement as he followed along behind me. With my eyes closed, in the quiet of my dark bedroom, his hoots rise out of the silence."

In general, the relative youth of these writers probably accounts for some of their difficulties. Greater experience, both in living and w ing on their craft—whether it be fiction c poetry—would undoubtedly assist them ir ortraying the most challenging of all aracters, that of the self. Maturity mi t also lessen self-consciousness in regar o expressions of feeling that seem partic ly associated with Nineties culture, and lso, mistakenly, with New York literary phistication. Too often these writers seem so bent on eschewing sentimentality that they end up squelching all sentiment.

Where's Raymond?

Raymond Klibansky Le Philosophe et la mémoire du siècle. Tolérance, liberté et philosophie.
Les belles lettres, 307 pages, 135 FF.

reviewed by J. Duncan Berry

We all know people who have led charmed lives, either by grace of high birth or, perhaps compensating for one's birth, by extraordinary effort. Certainly, luck plays no small role in these cases, for even the most fortuitous beginning requires constant attention.

Raymond Klibansky, born in 1905, is still leading such a life. His recently published autobiography (more accurately, an extended conversation with a former pupil originally prepared for radio broadcast in Canada) is a stunning testimony to how an individual can tap some of our civilization's deepest intellectual roots and play significant roles in our time's most demanding conflicts, all the while maintaining contact with some of the leading players of nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectual history.

Klibansky is probably best known for a collaboration with art historians Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl on *Saturn and Melancholy*, written in German during the 1930s but only published in English in the mid-1960s. Revised and expanded editions have appeared in French and German. It has been acclaimed as a classic in the history of ideas, medicine, art, philosophy and science, but inexplicably the English edition has been out of print for years. The chapter in the autobiography dedicated to "Saturn's Children," especially when read in tandem with Klibansky's 1989 preface to the French and German editions, offers fresh perspectives on melancholy as well as on the intricate genesis and reception of the book.

Needless to say, the author's connections with the leading lights of the Warburg circle alone would have vouchsafed his standing in twentieth-century humanities studies; in fact Aby Warburg handpicked him to organize the philosophy section of the famed Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg. It was also Klibansky who wrote the letter that finally persuaded Warburg's brothers to dispatch the library to Great Britain. Klibansky, along with Edgar Wind then in London, accomplished this delicate feat in the months immediately following Hitler's ascension to the Chancellorship. During the war, Klibansky, like Warburg's eventual biographer Ernst Gombrich, worked as an intelligence officer for the Wartime Political Executive in London.

But this is to get ahead of the story considerably. Klibansky was born in Paris to a Jewish wine merchant of Lithuanian-German descent. The family emigrated to Germany with the outbreak of war in 1914. Klibansky studied at the prestigious Goethe Gymnasium in Frankfurt and subsequently at the progressive Odenwald school,

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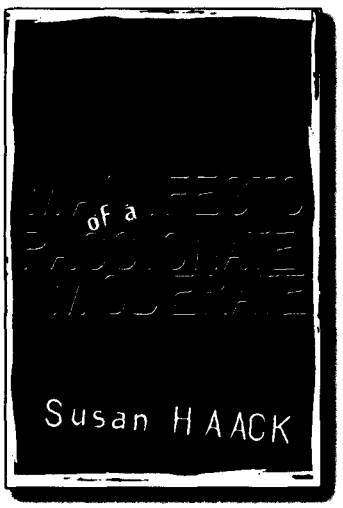

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alongside later luminaries such as the physicist Hans Bethe. Klibansky came to know the children of many of Germany's leading professors; his youthful acquaintance with Ernst Cassirer's family certainly provided an ease of movement in Hamburg's academic elites. Klibansky launched his university career in Heidelberg, where he was quickly befriended by Karl Jaspers.

The roster of his personal and academic acquaintances during the Twenties is mind-boggling, from close family contacts with the Weber family to an abiding literary curiosity kindled by Friedrich Gundolf (a leader of the Stefan George circle), from seminars with Ludwig Curtius, the preeminent archeologist of the day, to close contact with the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. It was due to Tönnies, whose youthful admiration of Marx had led to a friendship with Engels, that Klibansky would be able to later rouse his students by declaring that only three people separated them from Marx.

Klibansky's philosophic interests were expanded in courses with Heinrich Rickert, the leading neo-Kantian scholar of the day, as well as at Martin Heidegger's 1929 lectures "What is Metaphysics?" Friendships with Alexandre Koyré and Karl Löwith round out the picture of a man who by his mid-thirties had established what is surely one of the most enviable academic circles of acquaintances of his generation.

Other odd events added surreal flourishes. Leo Szilard, Einstein's Hungarian colleague at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin, confronted Klibansky with a frantic warning about atomic fission in 1933. There was also Klaus Fuch's brother, a former Gymnasium classmate, who contacted him while in London. A strident Communist "of a manner [Klibansky] could not approve," Fuchs sought out Klibansky's help in emigrating from Germany. By the time one encounters the exchanges with Albert Einstein concerning the possibility of setting up an international university in Israel, such matters seems routine, almost to be expected.

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As one might imagine, this book bristles with unusual and unexpected insights. For instance, his opinion of Hannah Arendt, a contemporary and Jaspers's protégé, is not what one might have imagined: she has, Klibanksy says, "beautiful formulas, but if more carefully examined, her thought is not profound. She is more a writer than a substantive critic" is not what one might have imagined. His characterization and explanation of military intelligence work as "simply the synthesis of historical and logical methods" is familiar enough, but perhaps never has the case been made so eloquently. Experiences of this nature are bound to endow even the most ethereal continental philosopher with a certain degree of political realism. Indeed, Klibansky emerges as a hardened realist when confronted with all varieties of National Socialist maneuverings, and he even regards the French collapse in 1940 as an essentially internal phenomenon only triggered by external events.

Klibansky's philosophical work began with the recovery and mastery of Nicolas de Cusa's oeuvre and with Meister Eckhart—ironical badges of honor, considering their appropriation by the Nazis. Klibansky's discomfort with the supposed opposition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance led to extensive work on their philosophical continuities, above all the enduring legacy of Plato. He extended and deepened the knowledge of these issues for new generations by launching the *Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi*. After his move to Great Britain, Klibansky took up the study of John Locke to enhance his feeble English; here again he became a leading figure. Direct participation in establishing open international lines of communication among philosophers during the Cold War was just another sidelight to his activities of the Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies.

The precarious balance between free will and the exigencies of an open society was one of Klibansky's philosophical touchstones, and it is to Leroux's credit that these concerns are distributed fairly evenly over the course of the book. Like the autobiography of the late Erich Voegelin, the conversational tone of this memoir enables one to move through a great deal of conceptual material at a good clip, but, again as with Voegelin, the autobiography only constitutes the tip of the iceberg. Klibansky and Voegelin were raised amidst the high-flying historicist abstractions of continental philosophy after the First World War, yet both were profoundly affected by what Voegelin calls "Anglo-American common sense philosophy." For Voegelin, it came with the duties of teaching American students political science; for Klibansky, it came from his contact with Locke. But while Voegelin evolved into a prodigious contributor to the "common sense" school, Klibansky seems to have always had a soft spot for the Leftist conceit that all differences can be mediated. While he can, rightly, reject Rorty, he never seems to have shed his continental Romanticism.

Indeed, this Romantic streak may have saved Klibansky from becoming a comic anachronism. One need only think of fictional characters who find their way into the leading events of the day, like "Forrest Gump" or Woody Allen's minor classic "Zelig," to appreciate just how quickly coincidence becomes farce. Klibansky, although appearing in many of the most important frames in twentieth-century life and letters, is too high-minded and accomplished a scholar to allow such a lapse to occur.

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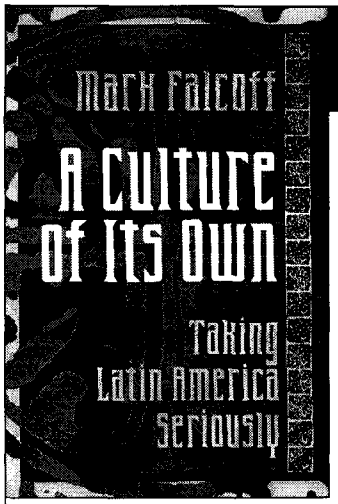

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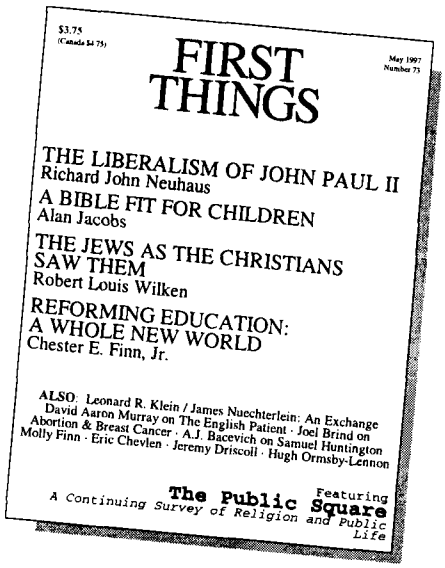
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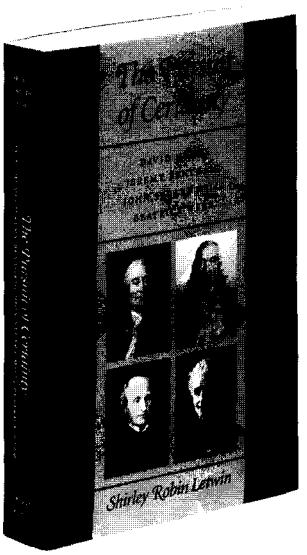

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Shirley Robin Letwin (1924–1993) was a Professor of Political and Legal Philosophy at Harvard, Cambridge, and the London School of Economics.

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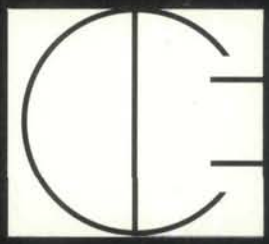

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